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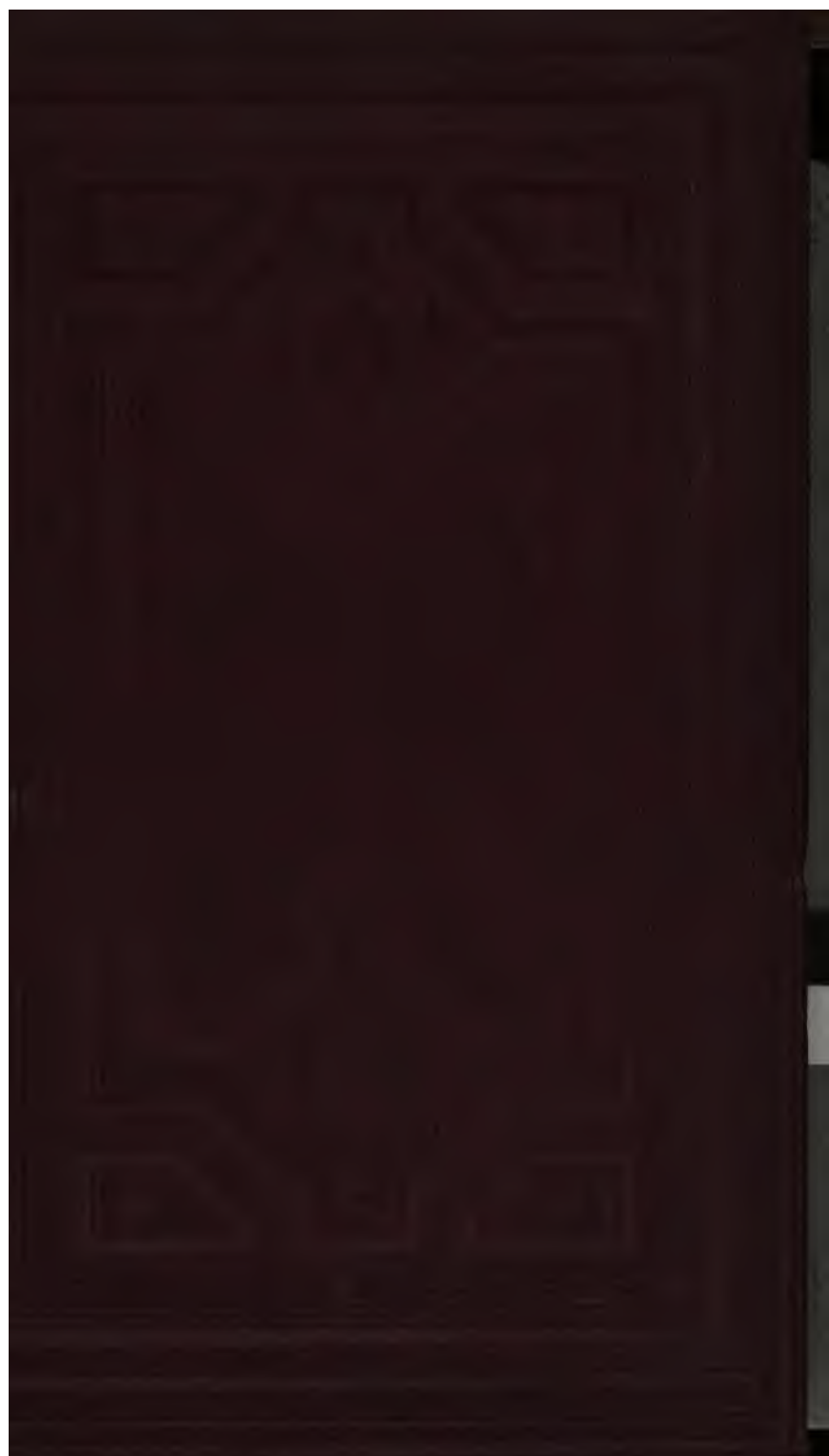
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THE HIDDEN SIN.

VOL. III.



THE HIDDEN SIN.

A NOVEL.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. III.



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THE HIDDEN SIN.

CHAPTER I.

A NEW COURTSHIP.

It was pleasant to step out of these dark thoughts and surmisings, as it were, into the little parlour of my own house, and find Rhoda in her best attire, presiding over a hospitable supper-table, surrounded by the honest contented faces of Watt Wilson, the two Masons, with their eldest son and daughter, and, to my surprise, Melrose Morton.

All but he had been invited for the evening (they were Rhoda's select society), and I took care that my sister should not be solitary when I went out to friends of a different order; but Melrose had dropped in unex-

pectedly, and been made welcome, perhaps he was curious as to what became of me on Sundays, but Rhoda had told him I was gone to the Forbes'.

"In course I did not think you were there, Lucien," said my honest sister, when we were alone in confidential talk, "but you said it was to be kept from all the world that you went to see the bank lady, and as it was only a white story, I thought I might as well tell it; goodness be praised that it happened to be true. He came—Mr. Morton, I mean—just when the tea was a-putting down, and in course I asked him to stay. I know that would not have been onproper in Ireland, and I hope it is not onproper here; he is your friend, and a very sensible man."

"Very, Rhoda," said I.

The habitual bloom on my sister's cheek had heightened as she spoke; a smoothing of her hair and an arrangement of her frills beyond the common had been made in the course of the evening, and it struck me all at once that the learning and the gentility found wanting in Watt Wilson were on the

side of Melrose, and that I had seen the Scotchman keeping a quiet but well-pleased eye on my sister.

The lot they were to draw came distinctly before me, an easy and a suitable one, notwithstanding that the one was a Greek scholar, and the other could never be taught to spell her mother tongue; they were both honest and true-hearted, free from vanity, ambition, and covetousness. He had knowledge enough to value Rhoda's sterling good qualities, and pass over the deficiencies which were but of surface and accident; she had sound sense enough to esteem his native nobleness and unparaded abilities. They deserved the good-fortune, never to be my own, of a happy and harmonious union.

My Scotch friend had come from Baltimore to take my sister from me, and leave me with a solitary fireside—a life overshadowed by clouds, not of my own raising, and heart going astray after Madame Palivez.

I thought of it all as I quizzed Rhoda about Melrose, and she blushed, and smiled, and said:

“He never paid her no attentions that she

could see; in course she liked Mr. Morton in a friendly way, because he had been a good friend to me—hadn't I told her so often? and he was an uncommon sensible man, she ought to say gentleman."

It was a long talk we had that night, for I told her everything except the look I had noticed on Esthers' face, and his subsequent remarks or insinuations on the Bayswater-road.

The manager was my enemy—a crafty and a fierce one; I had guessed it for some time, I believed it now; and there was reason for it on Esthers' part, for I had been made to cross his way. But why give my sister cause of dread and fearful surmise when I happened to be out late, and she was alone with nobody but Nelly, our maid, in No. 9? I could take care of myself, and I would not frighten her, so Rhoda heard all but that, and made her comments accordingly.

"I have often thought it Lucien," she said, "though not just plain enough for me to speak upon; with all their goodness and charitableness, Mr. Forbes and his daughter

could not look so down-hearted and onhappy like if they hadn't some trouble past the common. Considering their riches, too, many a time I have thought to myself the poorest beggars ever I saw on the roadsides in Ireland did not look so misfortunate; but, Lucien, that bank lady has the great sense, and I am sure it is true she tells you, whatever their trouble is, it is not Miss Helen's fault.

"I don't know about her father; he is a good man, and a great Christian in course; but rich men buy their riches dear sometimes, and will do more for money than poor ones, as Father Connolly said in his sermon about the camel going through the eye of the needle. Howmsoever, that Jew is a villain, and worth watching. To think of him taking Hannah Clark out by night and day, and making me think she was dealing with the fairies; larning her such craft, too, and sending her astray entirely if Providence don't take a hand in it; and then trying to get that good, blessed young lady and her fine fortune; goodness me, but he is the villain! Lucien, dear, there is just one thing you

ought to take care of; he'll hate you like the soot when he finds they lean to you, especially Miss Helen, as I know she does."

"How do you know that, Rhoda?"

"Well, I just can't say; Miss Forbes is uncommon proper, but the properest thinks of somebody at a time; and, Lucien, if it was the will of Providence, and you inclined to it, a better thing couldn't happen to any man. Whatever trouble is about them, it can't concern us, and there's the bank would make you a gentleman, though in course you are one already; but money is a good thing, and Miss Helen would be good without it."

I tried to disabuse my sister's mind of the idea of Miss Forbes entertaining the slightest preference for me, but it crept into my own. I had got the hint from two such different quarters; Madame Palivez and Rhoda had become oracles to me, each in right of her own peculiar wisdom, and the banker's advice seemed full of the same insinuations.

But Helen was the young lady to whom I had been made over at the villa, the successor of Rosanna, chosen for me and pressed on my

attention by the one woman to whom my heart dared not speak out. Her father was rich, and had cause for living in retirement, whereby there was little chance of a very eligible son-in-law. She was a mirror of all the virtues, though not of all the charms; might be induced to marry the humble friend of the family to whom its unpresentable transactions might have to be made known, and would afterwards, in right of her seniority and superior rank, school and admonish him, as I had heard her doing to Charles Barry.

Yet in the midst of these censorious reflections there would come, with the very same conviction which flashed on me when they were spoken at the villa, Madame's wise and noble words, "Remember that Forbes' daughter is better worth winning than the fairest face in your acquaintance."

My reason believed, but my heart did not; it clung to that fairest face and the gifted mind that lent it such ever-changing play of light and shadow; yet I could not think of Helen falling into the clutches of the Jew, and for her own as well as her father's sake I resolved to stand between her and Esthers.

The next time I saw him was in his office, endeavouring to look as if nothing particular had passed between us, and according to his custom, when there was anything to be got over, deeply engaged with the bank accounts. I had determined not to provoke or remind him ; open enmity with the manager would not do on Madame's account and my own ; but I was also resolute, that if he ever made such ambiguous observations regarding the Forbes' again, to demand his meaning on the spot, and in the meantime let him see I had a memory, and could not be smoothed back to intimacy.

The Jew was keen, and my manner warned him directly ; he made no attempts to renew our familiarity. I don't think the man could have done it with all his craft, and it frightens me now more than it did then to think how fierce and deep his hatred must have been. It had gathered for many a month and many a season, ever since my coming to the bank ; the manager's antipathy was at first sight, my fortunes and my doings had augmented it day by day, and having allowed the fire to break forth, though only at a crevice, it was impossible for him to cover it completely again.

He probably had his reasons for not provoking me, as he neither attempted to domineer or give trouble ; but by degrees, perceptible enough to me, though not intended to be so, he withdrew from my sight and company as far as business would allow, sitting mostly behind a sort of screen which fenced his own corner of the office, and frequently retiring, papers and all, to his private room.

I had been too proud to go and tell Madame of his Sunday performance, and Mrs. Muncy's revelation. She had sent me from her not very well pleased, but back I would go ; it concerned Madame's interest and domestic establishment ; it was my duty to tell her who was the unknown friend of the girl she had taken into her house to be off my hands and out of harm's way, and I was at her villa-gate next evening as soon as business permitted. Old Marco came out as I opened it, and seemed surprised at seeing me.

"Madame is not here," he said in reply to my inquiry ; "she is gone to Paris."

"Gone to Paris !" I repeated, in perfect amazement.

"Yes ; I thought the signor had been in-

formed," and Marco looked as astonished as myself.

Madame had left home that morning; he could not tell me how long she intended to stay, but he knew she was to attend the wedding festivities of the young Prince Zamoski, and preside at a ball which her friend Hagit Bey, the Turkish ambassador, intended to give on the occasion.

I turned away, closed the gate, and strode back through the thick underwood and tearing brambles. Madame was too much occupied with fashion, with princes and foreign ambassadors, to think of me or my intelligence. I had said to my sister that great ladies would have their whims, and it was plain I had spoken truly without meaning it. She had taken a whim for my company, and it was wearing off.

Once more the terrible inequality of our positions rose up before me, like an iron wall. It was all to be expected, yet the change had come suddenly, and not like herself, after saying she was to be much at the villa that season, giving me a *carte blanche* to come when I could, and knowing I would have something to tell concerning Esthers, to set out for Paris without leaving

word or friendly sign for me ; it was treating a man like her lap-dog (by-the-bye, Madame kept nothing of the kind, but I had been filling its place, perhaps, and deserved to be looked on accordingly.) One could understand her recommendations of Helen Forbes now ; anybody might take the plaything she wanted no longer.

Well, the great lady would not be troubled with my calls for some time, yet I would do a friend's duty by her ; she should not be left in the dark on a matter which concerned her own household—in which, moreover, she had been generous to me and mine. So I went home and wrote a note, briefly stating the case as regarded Hannah Clark and Esthers, making all apologies suitable to my inferior position, for trespassing on her time and attention ; I understood she had left home and would not return for some time, but I thought it my duty to apprise her, and hoped to be excused.

That note I sealed carefully, wrote "private" on the corner, took it with me to the bank next day, knocked at the private door, and asked to see Calixi. The confidential servant made his appearance exactly as he had done at the finding of the signet ring ; things were going back

to that point with me. I inquired if he could forward the note to Madame ; yes, Calixi could. " Was the signor's letter in haste ?"

" No, it was of little consequence ; only a private communication on a matter of business which Madame ought to know."

" The signor might depend on its going straight to her hands," and Calixi bowed me out.

Days and weeks passed, I cannot say how many, the reckoning of that time is passed out of my memory, but I know they seemed the longest days and weeks that ever went over me. In their course I returned to my old and oft-broken resolution to get free, and tried to think of everything but Madame Palivez. I did not succeed, though there were other matters to think of.

From the Sunday in which he had dropped in and " been axed to stay," Melrose Morton became a more frequent visitor at No. 9. I welcomed my old friend the more sincerely that there was nothing for him to find out, no goings to the villa to be concealed from his observation or comment. I knew it was not altogether for friendship's sake he came ; the legacy business,

which brought him to London, would soon be settled. Melrose would have a very decent provision to begin housekeeping on, with his prudent, sensible ways, my sister's limited expenditure and certain annuity. There was no hindrance, no gainsayer in their way to a wedding and a home ; and their sober, quiet courtship always reminded me of what I had read concerning German professors and their frauleins.


He would sit for hours talking with me on public news, new books, popular preachers, or any subject of intellectual interest, while she prepared the bread and butter, poured out the tea, or sat at the farther side of the table mending shirts and stockings. This scholarly conversation was not for her to take part in ; but Rhoda listened to every word with unfeigned admiration, smiled intelligently enough sometimes, paid more attention to her appearance than ever I could induce her to do before Morton's advent, and stayed as little out of the parlour as her domestic avocations would allow.

Melrose did not talk to her ; at times, one would have thought him unconscious of her presence ; but his eye followed her when she

left the room, and lighted up when she returned. They understood each other ; and I, knowing that no better match, as regarded principles and character, could be found for my sister, and none more eligible, as regarded worldly affairs, could be expected, did a brother's duty, in letting both parties see that they had my best wishes for success on their way to the altar, and afterwards ; though, thereby, I should be left alone, as ever man was ; and the thought seemed to make me an old bachelor before the time.

Melrose came and talked, and Rhoda listened and smiled. As his visits were always in the evening—I don't think Scotchmen could court at any other time—he missed meeting Helen Forbes, who now called oftener than ever. My sister and she were positively growing intimate ; so was I at Notting Hill House, where my presence seemed singularly useful.

How Esthers came to the conclusion that I would be there every Sunday as a shield against him, I know not ; but on the very next, after our meeting, he sent an apology : in Madame's absence it was requisite for him to remain at the bank that evening ; robberies had taken



place in the city ; suspicious characters had been seen in the rear of the premises—he might say he had received private intimation that an attempt was meditated, and Mr. Forbes knew that duty ought to be his first consideration.

I don't think the Scotch banker believed it, I am sure Helen did not ; but being both prudent they made no remarks, except that Mr. Esthers was right if he thought the place in danger ; and I think Forbes answered his note to that effect. But the manager was not got rid of, though he avoided meeting me ; I missed him at all hours of the day out of the bank, I caught glimpses of him about the village, and about the house ; they were always brief and distant, but Helen told me that he was never done calling on one pretext or other, and I had reason to believe he did the same at the place of business in Threadneedle-street.

Why the Forbes' did not cast him off at once I can only explain by the fact that hidden breaches in people's lives are apt to bring on a weakness of mind of which such pertinacious ferreters can take advantage, and the Jew had caught them in his meshes before they were aware.

“I don’t know why he comes so much about us, for we don’t encourage him now,” said Helen, when I came early one evening, and found her alone in the drawing-room.

She had commenced the subject of her own accord; she often did so to my sister; the manager seemed to have taken possession of her mind, but it was in the way of fright and aversion; yet there was nothing to hear, except that he called very often, and his talk troubled papa.

Helen was manifestly puzzled herself on that subject; she took me into confidence, though it was involuntarily, for the gentle, patient woman’s life was fretted away with the unaccountable, unexplained trouble which hung about her father’s mind. His health was evidently broken; he was looking wan and worn; his nights were restless, his meals were often untasted; yet the family doctor could not say what was the matter, and Forbes appeared unwilling to talk of his sickness, especially to me. Yet I was welcomed to his house with the same unfailing friendship, always pressed to come more frequently.

“Sunday or Saturday we shall be glad to see you. You know our ways now, lad,” said the

banker ; “ they are sober and sad ones, maybe, but one had need to walk soberly, redeeming the time, you know ; ” and Helen chimed in with her belief “ that Mr. La Touche would allow for their peculiarities, and make himself at home with them.”

She smiled kindly when she said it, never let me go without promising to come back soon, went downstairs with me many a time after her father had said “ Good night,” to see if it were wet or fine ; and, whether or not it was for me she looked out of that bay window, I always saw her there when coming up the avenue.

CHAPTER II.

A SCENE IN WHICH SALLY JOYCE IS THE PRINCIPAL
ACTOR.

Is pride or principle the better fence to a man's heart? My experience seems in favour of the former, for now that Madame Palivez was letting me slip—going off to Paris without a farewell word—taking no notice of my note, and the watchful zeal it manifested for her and her house—I had not half such difficulty in avoiding the private residence in Old Broad-street, the path to the villa, or the windows in Mayfair, as I found when Rosanna and conscience were in the case.

I think it was about the end of July that all the play-going people of London were worked into a fever of expectation, thanks to the newspapers and hand-bills, concerning a dramatized

version of Sir Walter Scott's "Rob Roy," which was to be acted for the first time in London, under the special patronage of his Royal Highness the Prince Regent, who had at that time strongly taken up the great unknown as a Tory set-off against the lights of Holland House, and found it requisite to be popular and charitable, because the spies were already on the track of his travelling spouse in preparation for her contemplated trial.

The Scotch play was to be performed under his patronage, in aid of a relief fund for the linen-weavers of Aberdeen and Dundee, whom the sudden advance of the cotton-trade and the power-loom had completely thrown out of employment that year. It was 1819, memorable for distress in the agricultural and linen-weaving districts. Charity was wanted, and charity was given; and London rank and fashion profited by the opportunity to get up a new sensation with charity balls and plays.

The fast-coming works of the author of "Waverley," then in the vigour of his wondrous power and produce, were looked for and welcomed with an eagerness which no novel of these modern days wins or deserves. "Rob

Roy" had been dramatized and acted in Edinburgh, under Scott's own direction. The theatrical company who played it there were coming to London, and the entire Scotch interest—a most extensive one then—were in full ferment, and their enthusiasm leavened all London, being fanned by the breeze from Carlton House.

Every one with the smallest pretensions to taste, gentility, or charitableness, was going to the theatre, where "Rob Roy" had a tremendous run, and the fervour extended to my friend Melrose Morton. He was no frequenter of play-houses even in Baltimore, and I think had grown more serious since; but Morton was born in Scotland—a native of the same border county which rejoiced in the Wizard of the North.

We knew he gloried in the fact, and Rhoda and I were more pleased than astonished when he arrived one evening, armed with tickets for the upper boxes of the theatre. Rhoda had never been at a theatre in all her life—I suppose that evening must have been an event in her calendar. She was delighted at the prospect, the more because Melrose would take charge of

her. I had nobody to take—had not been at a play since the last one to which I took Rosanna; but I liked to see such proper attention paid to my sister, while thinking it my duty to remonstrate with Morton on the expense.

There were none of the upper boxes under a guinea. "Nonsense," said he—"is it not for the honour of Scotland, and the relief of the Dundee weavers? But do make haste and get dressed, for the crowd will be immense, and we had better be in time."

We got dressed and were in time. I sat beside Rhoda at her first play, with Melrose Morton on the other side, in one of the most crowded and fashionable houses then drawn in London. Boxes, pit, and gallery, all were in full dress, there was nothing else admitted—and now that the drama has fallen so far, and the opera risen on its ruins, it is strange to look back on the interest and excitement which that Scotch play had for the wearers of stars and ribands, diamonds and coronets.

There they were, packed as close as their inferiors could be; and what a blaze of jewellery and flash of uniforms there were in the private boxes! My eye went there, but not in search

of the Prince Regent or his court notables. By-the-bye, Scott was among them, and I remember seeing the man whom royalty and letters both delighted to honour—being agreed for once.

But when we had squeezed back into our seats after the rising of the whole house, and the thunder of applause which greeted his entrance, I saw a party who had come late into a box specially reserved for them. One was a tall man with a dark, serious countenance, and a sort of Eastern dress; his beard was long, and getting rather grey.

There was a small demonstration made when he appeared. He seemed to know himself as a person of importance; to be a stranger, yet not unaccustomed to such scenes, and somebody behind me said, "It is the Turkish ambassador."

The other was a younger man, and a Russian. I knew him to be such by his semi-Tartar face, by the military uniform he wore, and by the critically insolent look he gave the ladies, all but one, and that was the lady by whose side he sat, to whom he played the humble servant, or at least the attentive—the third and

principal of the party, for she was Madame Palivez, fresh returned from Paris, in a rich, new evening dress, all gold, embroidery, and diamonds.

How queenly, how beautiful she looked? Venus dressed for a modern theatre! There were hundreds of glasses and eyes directed to her box. Everybody knew the great bank lady. I did not intend to be seen looking at her. I did not expect that she would look at me.

She had passed me in public many a time without the slightest look of recognition, but now, to my surprise, she did recognise me. It was but one glance at the spot where we three sat, and then a sudden expression of pain—a ghastly paleness passed over her face. Was Madame going to faint? I started up involuntarily, but sat down again. What good could I do but occasion remark? The Russian had observed it as well as I. He was speaking to her, going to make a fuss; but she stopped him, used her fan vigorously; doubtless gave a satisfactory account of her perturbation; was looking all herself again in another minute, but for a shade of pallor which still rested on her

cheek ; engaged her two gentlemen in conversation till the curtain rose, and was thenceforth occupied with the play.

It had commenced, and the house was all attention to the renowned Scotch actors, though considerable noise was still made at the doors by late comers, for whom no place could be found. One louder burst than usual in the direction of the upper gallery made me look that way in time to see Sally Joyce with her sister, once my affianced bride, and poor Jeremy, struggling in through the dense mass that filled up seat and passage, for in that cheapest part of the house there was not convenient standing-room. Sally made her way, nevertheless.

I could hear her shrill remonstrance to the public and scolding of her relatives till they were drowned by cries of 'order' and 'silence' among the gods ; but she contrived to get a pretty good post of observation, from which her tall figure, and long, thin face were conspicuously visible, and she could see most of what went forward on and off the stage, including, as I became aware, from her malicious watch, the private box of Madame Palivez and her company.

She could see us too, and I could not make

out for some time why we engrossed so much of her attention, till, among the many crushes that came behind us, I caught familiar tones, and looking round, saw Charles Barry shoved off Melrose Morton's shoulders, on which he had been endeavouring to find rest for his hands having scarcely standing-room, for the upper boxes were now getting as full as the gallery.

"Oh, Mr. La Touche," said he, transferring his attentions to my back, "how do you do? Very glad to see you. What a confounded crush there is here! Worse than the gallery; but I could not stay with those people."

"Who?" said I.

"Well, Rosanna and the rest of them. They are no company for a gentleman," and Barry steadied himself as well as he might, for I perceived the gentleman had got more of the strong waters than was good for him.


What a shabby, downward-going look he had got already, though it was but the second return from sea since his marriage! The Forbes' took no notice of him now. They had not mentioned his home-coming to me; perhaps they did not mean to be aware of it. How truly was Madame's prophecy being fulfilled! and there

she sat fanning herself and looking on the play with the air of an amused queen, while the Turk turned to her for explanations, and the Russian seemed to be taking his cue from her look.

The play went on; I have seen it a dozen times since with far more interest than I saw it then, for that private box was my stage, and the company in it far eclipsed the Scotch actors.

She looked at me, too—I know she did, though not intending to be seen; and something of painful recollection was always in the look. Was it self-reproach for the careless casting off? My vanity or folly triumphed in the thought. I never knew the pleasure of being an injured man before; but when the curtain fell on the first scene, and one could hear anything through the cheering, Melrose Morton—who, with book in hand, had been diligently making things clear to Rhoda's intellectual comprehension—turned to me with a remark on the principal actor, and added, in a lower tone, "Lucien, the officer in the box with Madame Palivez is taking particular note of you; and I don't like his looks."

"I am much obliged to him, though I have



not the honour of his acquaintance. Do you know who he is?" said I.

"I'll tell you," said Barry, coming down more heavily on my shoulders; "he is a Russian, Prince Dashkoff, the son of that woman who helped old Catherine in the poisoning of her husband. They say he would not stop at the like himself. Have a care of him, La Touche, for he looks a regular Tartar."

"I am not likely to come in a Russian prince's way, Mr. Barry."

"Well, maybe not; but, he has taken a dislike, that's certain; those high foreign rascals do sometimes. There was one of them came in the *Rattlesnake* from Malta"—here the curtain rose, and Barry's tale had to come to an end.

I had not seen the Russian taking notes; watch as I would, I could not detect him after. But I knew he had observed the change that came over Madame's face at the first sight of me; and the dread of compromising her made me resolve to slip out as quickly as possible when the curtain fell on the last scene, and the densely-filled house was thundering out its applause.

"We'll meet outside," said I to Morton, well knowing that he would take care of my sister. I could have left her to his protection in a desert, for a braver, truer man never existed. It was terrible work getting out, short as the box passages are; but out I squeezed at last, stepped aside from the coming crowd to wait for Melrose, and breathe the air of the summer night.

How fresh it blows on a man's brow after the crush, the ranting, and the footlights!—bringing the contrast between the world's green sylvan times and our hot-pressed city life to mind. But all at once I perceived there was a boy by my side—a little page he seemed, though not in livery, and with a foreign look. "A vous, Monsieur," he said, slipping into my hand a card. It was Madame's own, deeply gilt, in the fashion of those days; and on the back was written, with her own hand—"Please to follow the bearer."

Any command from that quarter was absolute with me; but Melrose and my sister were not to be kept waiting and inquiring. I pencilled on the back of one of my own cards—"Don't wait for me; I have met an unexpected friend,"

placed it, with some securing silver, in the hands of a trusty-looking messenger, with the name and a brief description of the party to whom it was to be delivered, and followed the boy.

He knew his business and his way ; the latter led through lanes and alleys of whose existence I had no idea : they threaded between great houses and through West-end courts—the last of them was a mere passage, terminating at a high wall, with a narrow gate of cast-iron. The boy opened it with a key he had, and I stepped into a flower-garden small and square, like those of old London.

A grass-plot with a few rose-bushes it seemed to be ; but the place was so dark that I could scarcely follow the boy. He waited for me at a door in the farther end, and gave three low knocks ; it was opened by a chain or spring within, for I saw nobody when we stepped into a carpeted passage, where a lamp was burning, and a straight, narrow stair led up to a sort of ante-room.

I saw that the passage, stair, and ante-room were beautifully painted, richly carpeted, and perfumed, it seemed, by the oil burned in its

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lamp ; its light was soft, dim, and dream-like ; there was no sound to be heard either without or within ; and when the boy opened a door, and motioned me to enter a room, furnished in a rich foreign fashion, hung with rose-coloured silk and great mirrors, ornamented with vases, statuettes, and flowers, I started in surprise to see Madame Palivez seated on the opposite sofa in the dress she had worn at the theatre.

I never saw her embarrassed at meeting me before ; but now there was embarrassment, and trouble in her look as she rose and extended her hand, while the boy retired, and closed the door noiselessly behind him.

“I am glad you have come, Lucien ; I wanted to see you, it is so long since we met ; so sit down.” Her fingers felt icy cold, but the clasp was as kind as ever. “Did you see me before I went to Paris ?”

“Yes, Madame ; I called to tell you about Esthers and the Forbes’. I called on Monday, too, and found you were gone ; I left a note for you in Broad-street, because I had heard something you ought to know.”

“Oh, yes, I got the note”—Madame looked

like one who was catching up threads of memory —“it was about——”

“About Hannah Clark and Esthers, Madame.”

“Yes, yes, I recollect; and you were going to the Forbes’, and were to have come and told me how he and they got on; and I did not say I was going to Paris, and Calixi forwarded the note a week after. I recollect it all.”

Had she fallen asleep since that Saturday evening, and only woke up to my existence, and the matters we had so much interest in, at such a distance of time?

“You don’t understand me, Lucien, and it is not to be expected you should; but I will explain my friend. It is a symptom of approaching death—a family one—which has come to me—a sudden failure of memory, to which all the Palivezi have been subject as the time of their departure drew near. I forgot to tell you that I was going to Paris that evening when you called. I forgot to leave a message for you—I forgot that you were to come at all. Your note reminded me of everything; but I could not answer without an explanation,

which I did not choose to put on paper ; and when I did return, I forgot there was anything of the kind to be done till I saw you in the theatre. You must have thought my conduct strange, unfriendly—perhaps unhandsome ; but that is the true account of it. And oh, Lucien, it warns me that I must prepare to go !”

“Impossible, Madame,” I said, gazing on her, as she sat before me in the strength and vigour of life’s midsummer—its bloom upon her cheeks and its brightness in her eyes. “I would take a lease—an annuity—on your life. That loss of memory is strange—stranger than anything I ever heard of ; but everybody is subject to unaccountable accidents of mind. You are not going to die for many a year ; cast the idea from you. Such omens are apt to fulfil themselves ; gloomy thoughts and fears undermine both health and spirits.”

“Yes, Lucien, you think me weak and foolish to be so frightened at the prospect of the common lot ; but you are mistaken. It is not the leaving of this,” and she glanced carelessly on the rich, luxurious room, “it is not the leaving of wealth and honour, with all that waits on them—not the quitting of this living

world—its daylights, its fancies, and its flowers—for the shroud, the coffin, and the clay—that chills my heart with a terror I cannot express. I think that death is but the passage to another life—a better one, it may be. Yet I know not—the Fates may still keep hold of us; but the uncertainty gives space for hope.

“It is not death I fear—neither did my forefathers fear it. The blood that marched to Thermopylæ with lyre and flute, that made Marathon a laurel-bearing field for all time, was in them. Our Athenian ancestors did not picture him a skeleton, with scythe and sand-glass, like your Christian King of Terrors—so profitable to priests and churches—but a youth, beautiful and fadeless as Apollo, with everlasting peace upon his brow, and a friendly hand stretched out to weary mortals, leading them down to Lethe, where they might drink and forget their griefs and burdens. They did not fear him, nor do I, with the dread of these weak and creed-stricken times; but, Lucien, Death comes on to me with terrors that are not his own—terrors for which my mental or physical constitution can never be prepared, though I have tried hard to cope with them; and there

is no help to which one can turn. The last of the Palivezi—and the most unlucky, too—all that went before me had some of their own blood to depend on in that worst extremity; but I have none—no help, no trust. Lucien—companion, friend—who came to me a stranger, yet would not remain such—saved my life, heard my secret thoughts, sat with me in the midnight watch of fearful memory—will you stand by me like a true man, in spite of the world's customs, laws, and faiths, and do me that one last and greatest service, which I have done to the Palivez that had none but me to do it?" She looked me in the face with such sad, imploring eyes, while her satin glistened and her diamonds flashed in the light of the one wax-candle, so placed that it shone full on her, and left the rest of the room in dimness.

"I will do anything to serve you, Madame, let the world say what it will; it is my duty to stand by you; tell me how——" I was going to say, but she interrupted me with "Duty, Sir?" and the sad look changed to one of tameless pride; "I wanted a friend, and you speak like a servant. I tell you there is nothing so hateful to me now as duty; it is the thing

people get paid for, grow respectable upon, keep shops and houses and go to church with. That was not what I looked for; yet pardon me," she grew softened and sorrowful once more—

"I fell into the error of desperate people, and expected too much. You are not the friend I want; you cannot be; there are great gulfs between us; your life has ties, prospects, and obligations not compatible with such woeful service."

"None that I know of—none that I acknowledge, Madame. Tell me of what the service you want consists; let me be your friend—your helper, at all hazards, what ever be your difficulty; whatever I can do against it, as far as my power, my energy, my life extends, I am ready and willing, and will hold myself happy to make any effort or run any risk for you." I had risen and stepped close up to her side, for I knew the woman needed me, and my heart was on my lips.

"Lucien," she said, taking my hand in hers, the soft white fingers were no longer cold, and the look, though still sad, was kindly —"Lucien, if I asked you to do that for me

which you must hide for ever from the world, for fear of blame and law—that which would cast a shadow over all your after-days, and come with ghastly clearness to your midnight dreams—that which would lie like a burden on your memory, not to be shared with friend or sister, with the woman whom your heart took for its latest choice, whom you found fairer, better, wiser than Rosanna—Lucien, if that were the service I wanted, would you promise and stand by me then?”

“I would”—the words came from me in a gush, like the breaking forth of long pent-up waters—“I would, for that woman is yourself; it was you I found fairer, wiser, and better than all the women in the world; it was you that made me false to the girl, before I knew she had been false to me! I never dared to say so before, because of our different stations; forgive me for saying it now, but believe that it is true, and command me!”

Her hand had shrunk away from mine as if a serpent stung it; she had covered her eyes with it, and leant back on the sofa. “Lucien, Lucien, is it come to that?” I heard her gasp out, but at that moment a shout loud enough

to startle all Curzon-street, something between a laugh and a howl, but so shrill, so wicked, so unearthly, as might have turned one's blood to hear, sounded from the opposite corner; and from behind the rose-coloured hangings out bounded Sally Joyce.

CHAPTER III.

SALLY'S BRAIN OVER-BALANCES.

“I HAVE caught you, I have found you out, you villain, you traitor!” she cried, while her eyes glared on me through the mass of rough grey hair which dragged over them—“out of your own mouth have I heard that you deceived and forsook my sister, keeping her hanging on, and shirking off your engagement till you drove her to marry that scapegrace, Charles Barry, that his own uncle and cousin won’t associate with now. And it was all for this fine lady, her bank and her grandeur, was it? Oh, you may set yourself, and look mighty high and proper, Madame, but I have a tale to tell the world, and I’ll tell it. I have seen your love-making, and your carrying on; if I had stayed

long enough behind that curtain, I would have seen—”

“Silence!” said I, seizing her by the arm, for the words she added were not to be repeated, and my senses had recovered from the shock of her appearance—“silence, and leave this room ; you shall not insult Madame Palivez when I can prevent it.”

“Insult Madame Palivez !” she cried, with another howl of a laugh ; “are you her protector? Did she tell you whom she murdered in Dublin, eighteen years ago, and shut up my brother in a mad-house for fear he would let the world know? But I’ll do it. I’ll revenge my sister’s wrongs—I’ll bring the wicked to justice—and you, too,” she cried, turning on me like a tigress, as I attempted to push her out of the room, with the unheeded threats of the law and the police. It was a desperate struggle ; the wild woman, now wrought up to frenzy, bit, struck, and tore with her nails, all the while screaming out her threats and charges in a voice which must have alarmed the whole neighbourhood, if I hadn’t kept it down by thrusting my handkerchief on her face, in mortal dread of compromising Madame. Her look

of composure or rather complacency was very nearly as frightful. She had started in surprise at Sally's first appearance; but all the while the latter shrieked, and struggled, and tore, she sat looking at her as one of the Spartans might have looked on a drunken Helot; and when at last Sally uttered a howl about murder which I could not smother, and fell at the room door in a terrible fit of convulsions, she said, quietly,

"Let her alone, Lucien; the woman is mad; her brain was never fairly balanced; it is fairly overset now, and will never right again. It was to be expected; I am not glad it has happened, for I know its origin; but her talk about me and my family can do no harm from henceforth. Leave her, Lucien, and leave me; there are none of my English servants in the house to-night, or you should not have been here; I want no London gossip about me and my friend; but help must be called to get the woman removed. Get out of sight as quick as you can; at the end of the passage leading from the garden gate, take the second turn to your left, keep straight through the courts, and

you will get out behind Lansdowne House. Go, for Heaven's sake go!"

"And leave you here, Madame! what if she should die in those fearful convulsions?"

"No, she won't; Fortune and she are not such good friends as that—go, go! I'm not afraid to be left alone with a woman in a fit." Madame motioned me to the door with one hand, and with the other rang her bell.

"Cyprien," she said, as the boy instantly entered, "you have left the garden gate open to-night; look at this," pointing to the writhing woman on the floor as if it had been a stray cat that had got in, while I stepped past as quickly as I could, hurried over stair, passage, and garden, found the turn to the left, got out behind Lansdowne House, and reached the front of her mansion in Curzon-street in time to see a sedate nurse-like woman and a surgeon's assistant accompanying two policemen down to the sunk flat. There were no lights to be seen, no noise to be heard within; the house stood as silent as all the rest of the street, to which the latest carriage had by this time driven home from ball or play; but in a few minutes a hackney coach drove quietly up, the police-

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man and the nurse-like woman brought out a large bundle covered with cloaks and shawls, but in strange motion under them, got it into the vehicle with a whisper or two among themselves, the woman getting in beside it, while the surgeon's assistant marched after as it was driven slowly into Bolton-row, and the policemen moved down the street, counting silver like those that divide the spoil.

Should I return and see how Madame had got over it? I heard somebody inside locking the hall door; perhaps she did not wish to see me there; perhaps my presumption had offended her; yet her words, "Lucien, Lucien, is it come to that?" had a sound of grief and not of anger. But I could not go back without a sign of invitation. I lingered about the door, went round to the garden gate again; it, also, was fastened for the night, or rather the morning, for day was breaking by this time, and with a bewildered brain and weary heart I turned homewards.

The events of the night had been so many and so strange that my thoughts of them were confused and hazy. I only knew for certain the old fact, that I loved Madame Palivez—the new

one, that I had dared to tell her so—that she wanted some service of great risk and peril, and that, in spite of all my sister's warnings, I had pledged myself to do it. Pledged, and did not repent it, even then—after all I had seen and heard from the overset brain that would never right again—and the proud, stony face that looked on so complacently, because talk about her and her family could do no harm from henceforth. I was bound to the service, and could not redeem myself, long before I promised ; and things would never right with me either. The conviction made me stop short on the now silent and solitary road skirting Hyde Park, and close by my own home.

The early light of a soft dewy morning was kindling from grey to golden over woodland and village. Up the green sloping lawn and massive front of Notting Hill House, so old-fashioned and lonely—up the shady path and stream, now flashing to the morning—that led to her villa, my eye wandered. I did not hear the lark go up singing from park and meadow—I did not hear a step that came along the London way till it was close by my side, and Melrose Morton's hand was laid on my shoulder, with—

“Where have you been? what has happened to you, Lucien?”

“Nothing,” said I, trying to look as I spoke; “did not the policeman give you my message?”

“He did,” said Melrose; “Rhoda and I got safe home, and we should not have been frightened about you—knowing you could take care of yourself; but as we were sitting at supper, poor Jeremy Joyce rushed in like one distracted, in search of his sister Sally. He said she had been watching you and Madame Palivez all the evening at the play, and a minute after you had gone out he and Rosanna missed her. She was not at home when they got there; and the poor fellow seemed to think something must be wrong, because Sally had been so uncommon queer of late.

“Those were his very words; and, Lucien, though neither Rhoda nor I imagined you had planned an elopement with Miss Joyce, your good sister was so much alarmed that I ventured out to look for you all round the neighbourhood of St. James’; and I’m glad we have met, for she and Nelly are sitting up alone, and must have thought the time terribly long.”

“Well, I am safe, you see, and sorry to have given you so much trouble, Melrose; but I could not help it. I had to go to a friend.”

“I hope it was a true friend, Lucien. You’ll excuse me; I am ten years older than yourself, and we have known each other long,” he said, looking me earnestly in the face. “Your sister did not give me reason to think you might be in unsafe company; she is too discreet, too sincerely attached to you. But I know Rhoda was not so much alarmed without cause; and, Lucien, if you have fallen into any dangerous connexion—one which you would not wish to mention to your friends—reflect, for her sake and for your own, and give it up in time.”

“Melrose, I have formed no connexion, either dangerous or disgraceful.”

“Not the latter, I am sure,” interrupted Morton; “but the company which the world would not reckon disgraceful, perhaps very much the contrary, may lead to risks beyond the common. There was a great lady in a private box, who was aware of your presence at the play, and a Russian Prince by her side, who took no friendly note of you. Lucien, I met

that Prince in a different trim—something like his own footman, I judge—within the last hour, hanging, and taking notes too, about Madame Palivez's mansion in Curzon-street; and I am mistaken if he were not fishing intelligence out of two policemen at the corner."

I made endeavours not to appear disconcerted or angry; yet I was both. Melrose had been playing the spy upon me, and was now playing the censor. He kept his own quarrel with Mr. Forbes pretty close, and he should not intrude into my friendship with Madame Palivez — though his news about the Russian was worth hearing; it showed me the ground on which I stood. Prince Dashkoff was not selected and adjured for secret service; but he had his aims, his expectations, and believed me in the way.

"I am much obliged for your warnings, Melrose, and I know your friendship; but most people have some private affairs. It was one of mine that made me part from you last night. What great ladies may be aware of, or Russian Princes take notes of, are matters that most concern themselves. I have no preference and no rivalry to boast; but I am sorry to have alarmed you and my sister. Let us go home

together, and relieve her and Nelly," and I took his arm in our old friendly fashion.

"I'll go with you, Lucien," he said, "because I promised to come back, though I see you have no confidence in me ; perhaps I had no right to expect you would ; but believe that my warnings were well meant, and try to think of them at your leisure, for people see things clearer that way."

Without another word, Morton and I walked to No. 9. Poor Rhoda was at the door, looking out into the early morning for her truant brother. Raymond had gone away and never returned to us ; and I knew that recollection had been pressing hard on my sister's heart, for she flung her arms about me, saying, "Lucien, dear, thank God you have come back safe !" and I promised, in a whisper, to explain everything, and told her, in a louder tone, not to be frightened at my staying out late, for I would get back again as sure as a bad shilling. Melrose looked sadly on us both, but only said he must play the bad shilling, and get home too ; and rejecting all persuasions to come in and rest after his travels in search of me, he bade us "Good morning," and walked rapidly away.

When he was gone, I told Rhoda a half-true tale—that I had been sent for by Madame Palivez because Sally Joyce was annoying her—wanting money and nobody knew what, on account of her father and brother having been in the bank at Dublin. I was not sure that it satisfied my sister; but she had been used to hear the half of things; and fairly worn out with the finery, wonders, and troubles of that night, the poor girl asked no questions, but retired with her trusty Nelly to get some hours' sleep; and I, like a restless spirit, paced about our little house and garden till it was time to go to the bank.

CHAPTER IV.

AN UNKNOWN VISITOR.

OF the day that thus dawned, and two or three subsequent, I recollect only that Esthers was scarcely in the office at all—that when he did come it was like one pre-occupied, and in great haste to get out again. He did not speak to me, and pretended not to be aware of my presence. Business was particularly slack with us then; and being by that time no apprentice clerk, I could do very well without the manager's oversight, and better without his company. There was little to do, but I had much to think of; the sights and sounds of that gay, luxurious bower in Curzon-street filled my hours, and made them pass in a dream of Madame Palivez.

Her talk of approaching death, her statement

about the loss of memory, the vow I had taken to her service, the words I had dared to speak to her, the howl of insane laughter from behind the curtain, the wild woman breaking out upon us with her madly malicious look, her unintelligible threats, and, clear above them all, her question to myself, "Did she tell you who it was she murdered eighteen years ago in Dublin?"

I could not forget those words—they haunted me like a nightmare; but I tried to see Madame, nevertheless—my alarm and anxiety after what had passed were surely sufficient excuses for venturing into her presence. I inquired for her at the private door in the first evening; the porter summoned Calixi, and he assured me that Madame was not there. I went up to the villa; old Marco came out, as usual, at the opening of the gate; but there she was not at home either; and when I asked him if he could tell me where Madame was, the old man said, with a look of honest bewilderment, "Signor, I cannot."

She had promised never to be denied to me; and I could not believe that system was adopted now. I had been sent for to see her in Curzon-street—would it be too presumptuous to go there and try the garden-gate? But the

memory of her words—"My English servants are not in the house to-night, or you should not have been here," checked me. Madame must not be compromised by her English clerk.

I was balancing these considerations in the last of her bank hours—I think, on the third evening—when I became aware of somebody having entered the quiet house—it was always most quiet at that hour—and making inquiries of the porter. I could catch first the manager's, and then my own name; and in another minute, the porter said, "A gentleman wishing to see you, sir," and showed in a foreign-looking man, well-dressed, but with something decidedly vulgar and mean-looking about him.

He was a stranger to me, appeared to be in middle age, and from my knowledge of the race in their comings about the bank, I recognised his features as unmistakably Russian. It was a sort of inward warning that made me give him, on his first entrance, a look of "What is your business here?" and it half disconcerted him—I suppose nothing could wholly—and he repeated his inquiries for the manager.

"He is not in the office at present," said I, "and I believe the porter mentioned to you that

he was not in the house; but if you have any message to leave, or any particular business, I am the English clerk of the establishment, and at your service."

"Is Madame Palivez within?" said the Russian, seating himself on the nearest vacant chair, and spying at me out of his narrow eyes.

"No," said I, "Madame Palivez is rarely at the bank, but her private residence is next door. The porter will direct you to it at once."

"Does Madame not manage her own business, then? I understood she did, and had a regular communication between the two houses: in fact, I expected to find her here."

What good, plain English the man spoke, and with what a look of collected brass he gazed round the office and stared at me!

"You have not been properly informed," said I, falling to my papers and pen with as much cool abstraction as I could muster, "Madame is not here, but you will find her at home next door. If you have any message for Mr. Esthers, the manager, be so good as

to leave it, for my time is limited, and the bank will soon be shut up."

"My business is particular—very; in fact, I am a merchant in the Baltic trade, accustomed to deal with the house, and you are Mr. La Touche, the English clerk, very much in Madame's confidence, I understand. Can you now," and he leant towards me with a manner at once insolent and fawning, "tell me where she is to be found? I would make it worth your while. My business is very important. She is a very odd lady, that Madame of yours—a deal of whims and private goings on, hasn't she? You know them pretty well. Come—come—you need not deny it," and he sidled nearer, as I was about to speak. "All the city know that you are in her confidence—far more than the Jew manager or anybody else. That's her way. She had a clerk in Dublin taken up in the same fashion. Got to know more than was safe, maybe. She is a wonderful woman, and nobody ever knew what became of him. Some say he is in a madhouse, some say he is dead; died very suddenly, they say."

"Sir," said I, rising in real indignation at

the manifest intention to frighten me, "is it your particular business here to make malicious and false insinuations against my employer?"

"Oh, dear no," said the Russian, not a whit abashed, "I can arrange a little matter with her or her manager, Mr. Esthers, you call him; and as there was nobody here, I thought we might have a little friendly talk; you are a gentleman I have heard so much of. One don't feel one's self a stranger to people one has heard of you know."

"From whom did you hear of me, sir?" and I looked him steadily in the face.

"From a good many different people." The man's bluntness and vulgarity were mighty defences. "A young man taken into confidence by a great lady is apt to get talked about, and you'll allow me to say I don't wonder at her preference. There is something uncommonly prepossessing in your appearance, sir. It was that and a friendly concern for a man younger than myself that made me mention what I happen to know of Madame's ways. A man warned is half armed. I know the house and its lady well. I am an in-

dependent merchant, and have no cause to speak against Madame, but an honest regard for you."

"Sir," said I, in plain terms, "I neither believe nor thank you, and if that is the whole of your important business, I repeat that my time is limited, and the bank will soon be shut."

"Well, I can come some other time when Mr. Esthers is within, and I am very sorry you take a civil hint so badly," said the Russian, looking calmly around him; then rising without the slightest embarrassment, he added, "You are uncommon like the clerk that disappeared. I wish you a very good evening," and stepped out as quietly as he came in.

That man was no Baltic merchant, but an emissary of somebody. Could it be of the Russian Prince who took unfriendly notes of me, according to Melrose Morton's observations at the play? His errand was evidently to make out how matters stood between me and Madame. I could have pardoned that, but not his endeavour to frighten me with a story of the vanished clerk, and it must have

been a more than commonly disciplined life that kept my Irish blood from kicking him out of the office.

There was some truth in that tale which he had got hold of. It had to do with Sally Joyce's raving; probably with the ragged man whose arm and knife I had seized in time. At any rate, Madame should be apprised of the Russian's visit; that was a better apology than any I had for trying to see her in Curzon-street. Accordingly, as soon as the bank was shut, I made my way to Berkeley-square, got through the courts and the turnings, and tried the garden-gate, but it was fast. Through the bars I could see the grass and flowers, the high walls that shut them in on every side, but not the door of entrance; it was in the corner, and hidden by a rose-bush of uncommon magnitude. There was no window looking into that garden, no sound to be heard from the house, no sign of life to be seen. I retraced my steps and got into Curzon-street.

The mansion was shut up as I had seen it last, above and below there was nobody at

home or visible. To knock at the door and inquire of the person in charge, if any such there were, was a proceeding I could not take upon myself, the caution that forbade it reminded me that I should not stand there gazing at the deserted mansion, and as I turned from it without thinking where I was going, into Bolton-row, two men who had been talking together at the corner suddenly separated, one of whom I did not catch sight of in time nor where he turned to, but the other, who came forward to meet me, was Jeremy Joyce.

“Oh, Mr. La Touche,” said the ever-subdued clerk, “have you heard of what has happened to us? Sally is gone out of her mind entirely. Something disturbed her at the play, and she went off to Madame Palivez’s house. I don’t know what put it in her head, but Sally was always fond of fine places and people—so she should, her mother was a lady—and I don’t know what happened to her there. She was not at home, and I thought she had gone with you, but before I got back they fetched her in a hackney-coach. We thought it was a fit at first; but, Mr. La Touche, she has been quite distracted,

quite frantic since. We have had no rest with her day nor night—screeching and tearing with two keepers to prevent her from finishing Rosanna and me. Charles Barry would not stand it at all, and went to some hotel; the people of the house wouldn't have us any longer in their rooms. Mr. Forbes was very good; gave me a week's holiday, and came to look after her himself and Miss Helen, but they could do nothing. She only screeched the more, and talked such uncommon things; and Madame Palivez—she is always kind, you know—got her into the asylum at last, just to save our lives,” and Jeremy looked quite resigned to that settlement of the sister who had governed him with such absolute sway.

“Is Sally gone to the asylum, then?” said I.

“Yes,” said somebody over my shoulder, and there was Esthers, “Madame Palivez got her sent. She always sends people there when it suits her convenience. Sally went out of her mind at Madame's house; do you mark that, Mr. La Touche; the like has happened to people before, and may happen to people again.”

He had got in between Jeremy and me by this time, and his look reminded me so much of Sally's that I could not help saying—

"Well, Mr. Esthers, I hope it will not happen to you."

The effect of my own words astonished me. The Jew staggered back as if I had struck him with all my strength. His dark face turned white as paper, and without attempting an answer he turned on his heel and moved away, rapidly quickening his pace till he turned the corner and was out of sight.

"Esthers don't like it at all," said Jeremy, keeping close to my side, as if bent on telling his woes. "You see Sally did not go to Madame's house, and did go out of her mind there, and we don't know what happened till she was fetched home, and she must have gone out of the theatre just after you, Mr. La Touche; and your sister and the gentleman did not know where you were, and Sally raved so about you and Madame. She always had a great regard for you."

"Well," said I, "I had no hand in sending her out of her mind, and I am sure neither had Madame. Perhaps there was madness in Sally's family—I don't mean your side of it—but Mr. Esthers is her brother, he ought to know."

"Oh dear, yes, said Jeremy, much taken

aback ; "but there never was anything of the kind, to our knowledge. Afflictions will happen in any family, Mr. La Touche. I suppose you are not so sorry for us as you would have been once, not that I think the fault wasn't more on your side than Rosanna's ; but you are in favour, and we are little thought of. I hope it will all end well," and Jeremy walked quickly away to the attic, where his sister was to have seen fashionable life.

Subdued, commanded, scolded, Jeremy had, as the poorest brains will have, his own notions of dignity and importance, his own small cunning to conceal and ferret out matters, and his own petty share of envy and malice to me.

What a variety of enemies I had got by that unpublished friendship ; but it was for her sake, and I took something like a martyr's pride in their increase. Moreover, would it not raise my worth and service in her eyes ? But where had she gone, and why could I not see her to make my revelations ?

CHAPTER V.

HELEN FORBES LOVES AND IS JEALOUS.

I WAS revolving these questions in my mind when very near home on the Bayswater-road, which happened to be more than usually quiet that evening; but the flutter of a brown skirt coming out of Petersburg-place caught my eye, and I hastened forward to meet Helen Forbes. She had seen, and was waiting for me, and the soft evening air had told with advantage on her generally colourless cheek, I thought, for it had taken a rosy tinge as bright as my sister's, whom she had been visiting.

"I daresay that Rhoda is glad to get quit of me; I am quite ashamed to have occupied so much of her time," she said, after our friendly greeting; "but we have been talking about a great many things: ladies will, you know, when they get together; is not that what you cen-

sorious men say ? always finding fault with our tongues."

I exculpated myself and sex in the most gallant manner I could assume, and Helen smiled and flushed till she reminded me more of Rossanna than herself.


"That's all very good ; but papa and I were wondering what had become of you, Mr. La Touche."

"I understood your father was from home," said I ; what made me think of such an excuse ? Helen's face fell grave and sad again.

"Oh, yes ! he was from home for a few days ; he had some business in Bath, and I partly persuaded him to go ; papa is growing so nervous and low-spirited. I am afraid he attends his business too closely, and sees too little company. I am but poor company for him at home, and he don't care for anybody else but you. I wish you had time to come and see us as often as Mr. Esthers does."

"Has Mr. Esthers been visiting you lately ?" I thought of his absence from the office.

"Oh, yes ! he is always coming ; when papa was from home I had to come down and tell him so plainly ; he would take no denial from



James, and you know I would not receive any gentleman except—except yourself,” said Helen, wiping her face with her handkerchief; “we are such very old friends.”


“Of course we are,” said I; “Mr. Esthers has no right to intrude where he is not wanted. If I might venture to advise your father and you, Miss Forbes, I should say make no ceremony with such a person. If a man shows himself destitute of gentlemanly feeling and delicacy, he ought to be dealt with accordingly, and get, what they call in my country, a genteel invitation to stay at home.”

“We must not be too ready to make harsh constructions, you know. Papa thinks him friendly on the whole, and believes he might get some good, some serious impressions in our society; and this is a world in which we are all called upon to do what good we can; speaking of which reminds me of the grievous dispensation meted out to the poor Joyce family. No doubt you are aware of it—poor Jeremy Joyce, our clerk’s sister, she went to a play, I understand, and was suddenly struck with madness; an awful dispensation, Mr. La Touche, and very like a judgment, though it is not right to think

uncharitably. Poor Sally! (is not that her name?) was always given to gaieties and frivolities, I understand; would live in the most fashionable part of London, though the family income is narrow enough, and never gave her brother or sister peace or rest with her love of plays and spectacles. Oh! Mr. La Touche, is it not a warning?"

"A warning as regards sudden outbreak of brain disease long in the constitution," said I, somewhat amused at the serious young lady's version of the affair. "Poor Sally's head was never steady, and the insanity which I believe she inherited from her mother has at length come upon her, perhaps, as you think, accelerated by the excitement of the play, which was a very fine one. My sister and I had the pleasure of witnessing its performance," and I looked Miss Forbes very straight in the face, but the acid of Scotch Calvinism was not so easily conquered.

"I am sorry you should find pleasure in such scenes, Mr. La Touche. I am sure you can find no profit, that is, no spiritual profit," said Helen, settling into the admonishing manner once reserved for Charles Barry.



"Opinions will differ on that as well as on other subjects, Miss Forbes; but probably neither you nor I could convince each other."

"Perhaps we could not, and perhaps it is taking too much upon myself to dispute the point with you; but I spoke as a friend, and from my own convictions;" the admonishing was all gone, and she looked sad and timid.

"Whatever you say will be honest and friendly, and I, above all the world, have a right to hear it with respect and attention."

"Oh dear no! not at all," she interrupted my amends-making; "you are far wiser, far more learned than I am, and though you may call it prejudice, and maybe laugh at me, I believe you will come to think as we do yet, and not be conformed to the fashions of the world which passeth away. But, to change the subject, now you will laugh at me for being curious too. How was it that poor Sally Joyce got into Madame Palivez's house?"

"That I cannot tell you," said I, speaking with a very safe conscience.


"I thought you might have seen or heard something of it, she raved so about you and Madame; it was dreadful to hear her going on

about a murder which she imagined you had committed that night ; I am not sure if it were you or Madame the poor creature meant, she talked so wildly, and always finished her story with a terrible dark asylum, to which she insisted you were going."

"A confused notion of her own destiny," said I.

"No doubt that is the proper explanation ; you would understand it all when you saw her," said Helen, altogether unconscious that my dread of having the boudoir scene rehearsed, or attracting the attention of the Joyces to my whereabouts after I left the play, had kept me from making the smallest inquiry in Bolton-row ; "and they have got her sent to a very well-conducted humane establishment," she continued ; "Madame Palivez did it for them. How kind that lady has been to the poor family whose father served in her bank ! She may be singular, being so very rich, and a Greek ; foreign ways are not like ours, and Madame has chosen to live single, which is always peculiar."

"Do you think so, Miss Forbes?" I had stepped close up to her, with the intention of



offering my arm, and either taking her back to No. 9, or seeing her safe home. I had got up to the quizzing point, and she had begun to laugh at her own admission, when there came along the quiet road a sound of horse's hoofs, the gleam of a white mane, the flutter of a green habit, and Madame Palivez, mounted on her Zara, came galloping towards us. My heart saw her before my eyes, but for my very soul I could not have kept them from fixing on her.

It was Madame's custom to pass me without word or look of recognition ; but now, before I had time to bethink or check myself, she slackened rein, stopped within a pace or two and saluted me with, " Good evening, Mr. La Touche," at the same time making a courteous bow to Helen. Never did the lady look more gay or graceful, the rich bloom of her cheek heightened by that evening gallop ; the always bright intelligent eyes, the braids of shining hair, which had somehow broken band, and were falling loose and wavy under her riding hat, might have become Artemis returning from her most successful hunt. " Well met," she said, " and unexpectedly. I should have seen


you sooner, but have been much occupied. I shall be at home in the villa to-morrow evening; come to me, for I have much to say."

"I will come, Madame." The words and the look had possessed me to such a degree that I forgot the woman who had been standing by my side—had been, but was not now; Helen had returned Madame's bend, and moved away.

"Go and join your company," said the bank lady, looking kindly reproving; "delicate, sensible girl, how quickly she got out of hearing! Lucien, we will speak of her to-morrow. Good-bye!" She gave the reins a twich and galloped away to London.

I stood for a minute where she left me, a joyful but bewildered man, and then I recollected my duty to Miss Forbes, who was walking quickly home. In my haste to rectify matters, I ran up to her, offered my arm, and vowed she must come back to No. 9, and take tea with Rhoda and me.

"Oh no, thank you," said Helen, in a clear, high tone, at the same time drawing down her veil, but not before I saw there were tears in her eyes; "we have not dined yet, and I am



expecting papa home: good-bye, Mr. La Touche, I should apologize to you as well as your sister for having spent so much of your time."


She gave me her hand quickly, still holding her veil down. I stammered something about being always happy to spend time with her, and before I could get anything else gathered, she turned up the road at a pace I had never thought her capable of walking.

I stood and looked after till she was up the avenue and in at the gate, then I turned and gazed Londonward, where Madame Palivez had disappeared, and in my mind there was a strange turmoil of joy and sorrow, of hope and fear. I had seen the lady of my thoughts and bondage; she was not offended at the revelation I had dared to make at last, after so much holding back and hiding. She had bidden me come, and had much to say, I was bound to her service by heart and hand, I would be proud to do or suffer anything for her sake; oh, that all the bank were in ashes, and she no dependence in the world but me, that I might prove the truth and loyalty of my affection for herself alone!

But that brief interview had brought me a dis-

covery, one never dreamt of, though perhaps it should have been—the only daughter of Mr. Forbes, my family's best and only friend, the stay of their adversity, the help of their last remaining branches, to whom I owed everything, for their sakes and for my own; that man's only and well-beloved daughter had fixed her heart on me. I was not so vain, so heartless a man as to be proud of the conquest. I had not made it intentionally, and Helen had kept her secret well. Her worth was known to me, in spite of strict Presbyterianism and an overshadowed life, a plain face, and sober unattractive ways.

I had seen, and had sense enough to value her sterling qualities of heart and mind, and I never valued them more than at that moment, when a sudden flash, struck out by that accidental encounter, had enlightened me on the way her thoughts were going. I don't think I was naturally vain, a tough struggle with the world is apt to take that folly out of a man, and I had got a lesson not to be forgotten, in the case of Rosanna. The once deceived will not readily help to cheat themselves a second time, and the difference between Helen




Forbes and Rosanna Joyce was that between a saint and a milliner's girl. I did not deceive myself and I was not deceived; the light had flashed on me unsought and unexpected, and what was I to do? Give up Miss Forbes' society, avoid her father's house, get misinterpreted by the generous banker, appear to slight the friends who had stood by me and mine so long, or keep my own counsel, pretend to have learned nothing, and let the good, gentle, noble-hearted girl believe that it was so? On Helen's part I knew it could be done without difficulty; she was strong in that womanly pride, failing which there is no true delicacy. I might have gone on for ever visiting and conversing with her as a friend, and yet have no cause to think myself a preferred man. But on my side, whatever inexperienced people may think, the case was not so easy.

The man must be virtuous, wise, or cold beyond the common, who can know himself to be loved, and act as if he knew it not.

Henceforth I must be always on the defence of my own motives, always careful to prove that I was nothing but a friend; and what was worse, that would have to be proved to the

father as well as the daughter. By the light I had now, signs could be read that had formerly escaped me. The banker always looked pleased at seeing us together, had not spared his daughter's praises; they were every word true, I could have pledged my life on it, but there was the meaning of his advice against Madame Palivez, and adjurations to look out for a faithful, affectionate wife. In the world's eye, what a chance for a young clerk without prospects or connexions, a flourishing business to step into as son-in-law and heir, a highly respectable family to be connected with, and the girl herself—shame on me, that I did not rate her native worth above it all.

But my foolish heart, ay, and my foolish hopes, were gone after Madame Palivez; could it be that she loved me too? the thought made my brain spin round in the wildest of all dances. What was to be said to-morrow evening in the villa? she had accosted me on the public highway in the presence of a third party, and she was to speak of Helen; to what purpose? If those two women were rivals, all history and all satire were at fault, for none could speak



more nobly of each other. But I had to go home with my unspeakable discoveries and expectations, and live as best I could to the next evening.

CHAPTER VI.

KILLING NO MURDER.

How much of life is consumed in waiting, and there is no time harder to pass! It passes, nevertheless, as the intervening night and day passed with me, and in the sunset light I was at the villa gate, with the brass key and my golden hopes. It was the jessamine time again, the season at which I had been first admitted to her woodland retreat.

She must have loved that latest child of the summer, and heir of all its sweetness; verandah, window, and door were wreathed with its green tendrils and pale blossoms; all the air about was filled with its fragrance, and flower and odour yet bring back to me the lady of the villa as she looked when I saw her last in her summer rooms, white dress, and braided hair, with one

large white rose from her own garden twined in the shining bands.

I thought she had never seemed so glad to see me, never welcomed me so warmly, and there was something soft and tender in her look, unlike the queenly manner and high resolute spirit which marked her at all times above the mass of women.

"Sit down here, beside me, Lucien," she said, "and give me your opinion on a subject which has somehow come into my thoughts this evening."

I had never sat by her side till then, and to my bewitched brain it seemed like the first glimpse of Paradise; but she brought me back to the earth by saying, "Have you ever read the old book called 'Killing no Murder?'"

"The pamphlet against Cromwell," said I, "after the reading of which he is said never to have smiled again."

"Any nonsense may be said, my friend," and she smiled scornfully; "Cromwell was not the man to be so affected by anybody's pamphlet; he knew all the Royalists could say before it was written; those who get and keep power as he did, are never sensitive to people's sayings or

writings. But it was not of him or of the old book I was going to speak ; what is your opinion of the argument set forth in its title, are there not cases in which killing would be no murder?" She was speaking calmly, and though rather surprised at her strain, I answered in the same manner. " Yes, the laws of England, and, I believe of most nations, recognise justifiable homicide."

"I do not speak of laws, my friend—they always suit the interests or prejudices of their makers—but of abstract principle."

"The rule holds good in war, then," said I.

"Ay, and in life's war," she said, "the long, long battle with evil and necessity, which we all wage from one generation to another, generally defeated, at best with only half victory, and always dear-bought. I am generalizing too widely, perhaps, having thought much on the subject, which probably you have not. Let us come to particulars then ; may not cases occur among the varieties of human misfortune, in which cutting the too tenacious thread of life would be the best and wisest thing for the dismissed, as well as for the dismitter?"

“As in that of Virginius and his daughter?” said I.

“Yes, and in those of thousands more, pressed on and shut up from all chance of escape, by evils worse than the villanous Decemvir. You don’t comprehend me; consider now, irrecoverable and irreparable misfortune of any kind sufficient to cut us off from our species, their pursuits, their hopes, and their sympathies. The like is not so uncommon, my friend; incurable disease, social degradation, the power of enemies, misplaced affections—if one be weak enough, though such are scarcely worth reckoning up, Lucien—would not the universal recognition of the principle we discuss save the world its hospitals of incurables, its lunatic asylums, its idiot wards, and all its other repositories of useless, stagnating, suffering life? would it not spare the cottage cretins, the unmentioned members of aristocratic families, ay, and the difficulties of royal ones? What suffering, what tyranny, what bringing down of our whole humanity, and scope for all that is vile and vulgar in it, would have been spared us too! There was a great and famous man of our own day, over one of whose transactions partisans have been busy

asserting and denying, ever since it was done, not to speak of the mighty coming out of moralists on either side, all because, as the general of an army obliged to retreat, and unable to take his sick and dying with him, he saved the unfortunate creatures from the inflictions of a cruel, fanatical enemy, by an easy and rapid poison. It was hundreds, says one partisan ; it was only some dozens, says another ; as if that had anything to do with the wrong or right of it. Right it was, Lucien, as the best and wisest course must always be, and the principle will hold good in private as well as in public life."

"I cannot agree with you, Madame." My senses were gathered by this time, and great as her power was over me, my moral convictions were not to be so argued down. "That principle of yours would leave no security, no value for human life ; it would give loose rein to the worst of human passions ; covetousness, selfishness of every kind, would turn it to large account. If the troublesome and useless were to be got rid of so easily, who would wait for landed property or money in the funds, when nothing but an old or imbecile life stood between it and them ? The

infanticide of Asia and the Pacific isles would be more than equalled in Europe; and suicide, under any circumstances, could be held no crime."

"Who said it was, my friend, except the slavish and cowardly creeds of these latter days, the worst and latest inventions of priests, whereby to get power and influence over men? That is what your boasted Christian faith has done for the world—I mean the world that received it; sapped its moral strength, and dwarfed its moral courage, by the weakest and most foolish of all fears—that of inevitable death; turning the Liberator and Rest Giver into the King of Terrors, and binding up the idea of him with churchyards and charnel-houses, out of which the sheeted ghost and the blood-sucking vampire came to make the wise and beautiful night, the time of thought, of sages, and of stars, terrible to rustics.

"The classic world, with its painted tombs and urns, knew nothing of them, nothing of the dread and shrinking which the thought of death brings to the Christian minds, supported by revelation, as they say. I do not speak of the Spartan going to sup with Pluto to the sound of

lyre and flute. The physical courage, the war-like element in man, is not easily subdued or sapped away till the decaying time of a race or system comes. Christianity found the Greek and Roman in that season ; history proves that it neither invigorated nor reclaimed them, for no creed can do so.

“ It was not it, but ages that civilized the Goth, the new doctrine enlisted his strength and his superstition when the northern gods were losing their sway, it may be because his migrations rolled too far from the polar circle of long nights and winters.

“ Yet, observe how little the classic Greek and the northern Viking feared to meet or think of the last enemy, and first if not only friend, Lucien, compared with the common habit and thought of Christian men. Nay, observe the believer in Brahma and Buddha. British officials in your Eastern colonies know well that capital punishments have little terror for the Hindoo and the Chinese, except when invested with peculiar horrors of cruelty or superstition.

“ Lucien, your security of human life has given priestcraft a fulcrum for his lever, which it has worked to the beating down of the

popular mind; has filled the world with miserable impediments, as if its progress were not slow and sad enough, and I suppose will make yourself rue and regret that ever you made compact and friendship with me."

"Never, Madame," said I. "Cannot people differ in opinion on abstract subjects, and yet be friends?"

"Yes, Lucien, but abstract subjects sometimes take a concrete form, and come home to one's own experiences and necessities. We won't go farther for the present," she continued, hastily, as my lips opened to ask an explanation—"I know you have news for me which I have kept you all this time from telling. What is it, my friend, for I must try to think you so?"

I had no chance but to collect my scattered thoughts, and tell her all I knew or could remember of my Russian visitor. Ay, every word, of his discourse about the clerk she had in Dublin. It was not so hard to tell as one would imagine, after her own talk, and Madame listened calmly, as she did to all manner of strange and terrible things, her face growing

more and more composed as the tale went on, and making no remark till my disclosures were finished.

Then, she said in the same quiet manner, "He was an emissary from Prince Dashkoff, the gentleman you saw in the box with me at the theatre. His highness has been from home for some years; his estates, in the government of Archangel, I think, are heavily encumbered; his travelling expenses are considerable; he knows that I am the last of the Palivezi; he does not know that the house of Comenzoni are our heirs, and he has fixed his affections on the bank. That is my reading of the man and his views, easy enough to read, because shallow. There is no depth, beyond a French hazard table, and a Russian intrigue, which always means fibbing and cheating, in him. But he is a relation, I ought to say an affinity of my mother.

"She was of the house of Cuzenes, great people in the Crimea, and of old Greek descent; one of her aunts married into the Dashkoff family; the prince is that lady's grandson, a sort of cousin to me, and ten years younger than myself, though he does not look like it: hazard

tables and their accompaniments are apt to tell unfavourably on a man's appearance.

"The prince was no great beauty by nature neither was his mother; but she had a hundred times his capability: you will read of her in the books and memoirs of the time as confidante and chief help of Catherine the Second, in her desperate but successful game of getting rid of her husband and keeping his throne.

"I have heard the princess's maid (you observe I am given to gossip like other old women) tell how on the night of the great attempt her mistress sat alone in the best room of her palace with a pair of loaded pistols on the table before her, till a page came with the appointed signal that all was right, on which she discharged them successfully out of the back window, to nobody's damage, I believe, remarking, 'It would have been through my own head if the Czarina's plan had miscarried; they should not have got me to send to Siberia.'

"Lucien, there was a woman of spirit, whatever else she might be; the princess was no relation of ours, remember, but a born Russian, the most capable race I know for deep plot and daring execution. These are their strong

points, and will give them the advantage of all the West in Europe's waning days, which seem to be coming. But to return to his highness : he is as well inclined to intrigue as his mother though not so able in it. He has been tampering with Esthers, or Esthers with him ; I must take some measures with that winding, worming creature."

And her eyes flashed with a fierce and sudden lightning, which left the face cold and calm again. "He is a sort of relation not to be acknowledged, of course, but still related ; only for that and for my father's promise to poor Uncle Alexis, he should not have been about the house so long, and now it is not worth while to make changes ; but he must not be allowed to give trouble."

"Have you thought of what I mentioned in my note about Hannah Clark, Madame?" I said, for the subject occurred with a force I could not account for at the time.

"Oh, yes ; you were perfectly correct ; there is some intimacy between them, but the dumb girl is exactly the person least likely to do harm under his management, and I have desired Madame Oniga to see that she comes to no harm

herself, which is not likely either, for Hannah seems to have profited by her discreet discipline. Esthers has been talking nonsense to Prince Dashkoff, however, and the Prince has been fishing information out of him. Russian highnesses can condescend to anything when it suits their purpose; but the result is satisfactory on the whole; it proves how little the Jew knows, how little his sister could tell him, with all the noisy pretence she made.

“By the way, that crazed soul had all the courage of the family, the rest have only craft; and what an exhibition of both she made by following you or Cyprian all the way from the theatre, and getting behind the curtains in my boudoir! That was in the breaking-up time of her reason. Lucien, it is wonderful what the unhinged mind can effect against material obstacles; an evidence of latent and unnamed powers, perhaps; but always useless and ruinous to itself and others. Sally will never recover her senses; there is no restoration from that eclipse, though she may live long—twenty, thirty years, perhaps, in a lunatic asylum.”

Madame seemed to be talking to herself—her eyes were nearly closed, and at the last words

her whole frame shook with a sudden tremor ; but the next moment she looked up, collected and courageous as ever I saw her, and said, "Lucien, would not that life be well cut short, and the burdened, fettered soul set free to seek its better fortune in another world ?"

"It would," said I, "if such were its Maker's will."

"My friend, how are you and I to discover that ?"

"By the event, Madame, which should neither be brought about nor accelerated by human hands."

I looked her calmly in the face, for the words were from my conscience, and they seemed to reach hers, for the first time in all our acquaintance her eyes drooped under my gaze ; she sat silent for a minute, as if revolving something hard and heavy in her mind, and then, with a sigh that seemed involuntary, said, "We shall never see things in the same light, Lucien ; perhaps, it is not desirable for your sake that we should ; but you are a brave and honest man, and will stand by your word, and serve me as you promised—say you will, for there is no man I can trust but you."


She stretched her hand to me, and it was

clasped in mine: had she commanded me to finish Sally Joyce, Esthers, and the entire family, my once own Rosanna included, I could not have refused at that moment.

Let no man boast of his strength till he has been fairly in the net; strong and wise men of old, Sampson and Solomon, were overcome by woman's wiles, and I am mistaken if the best or worst of their Delilahs would have been a match for Madame Palivez.

I know not now in what words I pledged myself over and over again to her service and commands; but as I spoke the woman's look grew sad and softened, I felt her hand sliding away from mine, and dared not retain it; she was queen and empress over me to the last; and then, as if determined to change the subject, said, "Lucien, don't mind that Baltic merchant of yours; if he come again, hear what he has been bidden to say. I will take measures with Esthers for so buzzing up his silly highness; if he were not a connexion of my mother, I should take no trouble with the man. You have never heard me speak of her before; she died long ago, in the year they sent me to be educated in that Greek convent beside the Euxine; but I

remember her well, and have her portrait among the ladies of our house—they were always taken in miniature; the men are at full length yonder on the walls of the bank, but no woman of the family was ever so painted, except the Kazan princess, whom you have seen and must remember. My mother was not like her, but a fine Greek face, not so beautiful as regular, which became her character, for she was a respectable, Greek lady of the old school, whose domestic manners had survived the vicissitudes of creed and empire, and undergone little alteration from the days of Penelope to my mother's youth. Like the Queen of Ithaca, she spun with a distaff, wove on the hand-loom, embroidered skillfully with her needle, superintended all her household affairs, was not to be seen by strangers, went out only on church festivals or visits of ceremony, and always deeply veiled, as matrons of rank and propriety were among the ancient Greeks, and still are in their northern colonies. I will show you her picture, Lucien, and, notwithstanding the classic regularity of features, which makes some difference, do you know whom she resembles? The lady from whom I was sorry to be your cause of parting,



yesterday evening ; tell me, why did you leave her so abruptly ?”

“ We had only met by accident, Madame, and Miss Forbes was going home.”

“ She seemed in no haste about it, Lucien, and neither did you, till I came forward. You were talking in the most friendly and confidential manner ; so you should, my friend, and I was glad to see it.

“ Do you know that I made a discovery that hour on the Bayswater-road, one which you should never hear of if I did not think you wiser and better than common men ; Lucien, that virtuous, pious, gentle woman loves you with all the strength and truth of her pure and constant nature. There is a treasure come to your hand, ay, and to your heart, if you have wisdom and worth enough to value it, which great and good men have not been blessed with. ‘ He that a good woman loves is fenced against all evil,’ says the Tuscan proverb.

“ Helen Forbes is a good woman, if there be one on this side of the blue. She is her father’s heiress, but we will not speak of that ; I know you are not the man to be bribed or bought in marriage. But her tender and true affection

will complete for you the golden round of life, broken and fragmentary to so many. Your domestic comfort, your worldly credit, your family affairs, will be safe in her keeping; and, more than all, she loves you, Lucien; the man is worse than a fool with whom that counts for little."

"Madame," said I, the whole man within me rising against being so made over and disposed of, "I know Miss Forbes deserves all the praise you give her, but were she ten times as good and as worthy I cannot love her, having loved another. What I ventured to tell you at our last meeting was true, whatever you may please to reckon it; I spoke in haste, and sore pressed by the feelings of the hour. If it were displeasing to you, as I suppose, forgive me for the sake of the circumstances, but I cannot forget that it was uttered, and that it was true."

"No, Lucien, it was not, it could not be," and she wrung her hands with a look of hopeless misery, "there are twenty years between us, my friend; I knew the mysteries of life before you were born. Yes, it is true, I look younger than my years; and there are barriers far more impassable than the disparity of age."

"Our different positions?" said I.

"No, these are outward chances which my choice could step over, would have stepped, perhaps, whatever the world might count it."

It was a vague, foolish hope waking up in my heart that made me clasp her hand between my own, which were trembling like aspen leaves.

"Yes, Lucien," she was calm and collected now, and the words came soft and slowly, "there is something in my own mind, something in yours, something in the fate or chance which brought us to be acquainted, which tells me we were not born strangers. Maybe it was in the former life that we knew each other. Yes, my friend, there was an existence before this for some of us ; don't you dream at times of places and things you never saw ?

"There may be many lives with the Lethe between them ; perhaps it is in one to come that we are to meet again ; I know there are such predestinations ; but on this side of the churchyard clay, Lucien, there can be nothing but friendship between you and I. Don't look so vexed ; no life can have in it anything nobler or more worthy of the soul than friendship ; it survives all chances, it outlasts all changes. I am speaking of the true, immortal sort, and if

that link of eternity be between us, we will come together in spite of time and space. I cannot prove, but I believe it, and I believe in you as I never did before.

“Don’t ask me why ; the truths that most concern us are revealed by flashes ; I know now you are the one friend my weakness or my faith has sought for among all that ever passed me on life’s highway—what a weary, dusty, obstructed one it is—the friend that will open the gates of death for me, and send my soul free and unburdened to the heritage that has no mortgage to the powers of darkness and evil on it.”

“Kill you !” said I, starting up, and my own voice sounded strange and hollow. “Madame, whatever you may have made me promise, I will never do that.”

“You will, Lucien, my first, my only friend ; you will do more for me than Virginus did for his daughter, for I have a greater evil to escape from, and no blame of the foolish world will fall on you, no danger from its laws.”

She held out her hand to me, but I could not take it, though never had she looked more kind and tender.

“What do you mean, Madame? For God’s sake tell me what put such a thought in your mind!”


“A fact in my family history with which you are not acquainted, Lucien; sit down and listen to me; you are the first man, not a Palivez, to whom it was ever told, and I know you will keep your promise.”

I sat down mechanically, but not now so close by her side, and she proceeded with the firm look and tone of one who had wound herself up to the task, and would fulfil it.

CHAPTER VII.

THE HISTORY OF THE PALIVEZI, AND THEIR
DOOM.

“My family was reckoned old and illustrious among the Greeks settled in Southern Russia, that corner of ancient Scythia, to which Greece sent out her earliest colonies, the meeting-place of Europe’s old civilisation and most ancient barbarism, where the creeds and customs of East and West still flourish side by side, and their races have dwelt for ages without mingling. We were not sprung from the early colonists, but of the Attic stock; Archons of Athens were among our ancestors; but, like many of the Greek patricians, we removed to Byzantium, when Constantine the Great made it his capital and founded the Eastern Empire.



“Ages after, when the Ottoman Turks were becoming known on the Greek frontiers, and the Russians of the North were catching the lights of civilisation and Christianity from Constantinople, a dispute with the Patriarch which began about Church dues, and ended in an accusation of worshipping Jupiter, made us emigrate first to the flourishing city of Novgorod, and afterwards to Kief, still the holy place of the North, and then chosen by Saint Vladimir as the capital of his new-christened kingdom.

“From that period the Palivezi lived and traded among the Greeks of Russia. Always of patrician rank and good estate, they had become merchants and bankers as early as the Roman times; the Greek nobility gave example in this respect to those of Venice and other Italian cities. They carried their business with them to the North; Novgorod and Kief were the emporiums of European and Asiatic commerce; from the tenth to the fifteenth century, the Greeks monopolised its higher and more profitable branches, and the Palivezi were the most successful house among them. In spite of intestine wars and Tartar

invasions, which often passed over the land in those five hundred years, their mercantile prudence, enterprise, and honour—which, by the way, were equally proverbial—enabled them to gather and keep riches which no other firm in the North could boast. It was their wisdom and it proved their strength.

“Lucien, whatever philosophers may say, wealth is worth striving for; it is the one power which commands all material things, and, to some extent, the minds of men; yet it may be over-prized and over-paid, as happened in our house.

“The Palivezi had acquired very great influence and authority on the banks of the Borysthenes, through their credit in foreign lands, and the capital they could command at home. They had made the northern princes their humble servants, through loans and subsidies; they had raised troops to defend the cities where they dwelt, against the Tartar; some of them had commanded their armed companies and done the invader no small damage. When at length the northern torrent overwhelmed the land, they bribed

barbarian prejudices, bought over favourites, and thus obtained good terms from the Tartar chiefs, with whom they treated on their own account as independent powers. They had similar dealings, warlike and pacific, with the Poles and the Teutonic knights ; in short, with all the conquerors and troublers of those times.

“ But Russia struggled back into national life. Vasilrewitsch shook off the Tartar domination, and built the Kremlin at Moscow, the cross was established in the north, and the crescent waned before it step by step, and year by year, till in the days of Ivan, called by his own subjects the Terrible, and known in England as the Muscovite Czar who sent ambassadors to Queen Elizabeth, and allowed her subjects to form a trading company at Archangel, the kingdoms of Crimea and Kazan, to which his ancestors had paid tribute, were conquered and reduced to Russian rule, the whole South and East, as far as the frontiers of Poland and the Euxine Sea, became his dominions, and the Palivezi had to deal with an absolute and Christian Czar.

“ They lent him money, as they had done

to his predecessors ; they bought over his ministers and favourites—for the terrible Ivan had some such—but Christian Russians were more expensive to bribe and buy than Mahometan Tartars. The conquering Czar could not be so well secured by loans as his tribute-paying ancestors had been ; it was requisite to please and serve him too, if they would live and trade within his bounds, and about this time Ivan required a piece of special service.

“ He had conquered the kingdom of Kazan ; internal feuds and the chances of war and time had exterminated its royal house all to one old man, trembling on the verge of the grave, and his daughter, the last but undoubted heiress of the Tartar line. It was true that women counted for little among the Eastern and Moslem races, but the blood of Zingus was in her veins ; the Tartar chief who happened to marry her might claim the sovereignty of Kazan, in her right, and Ivan was determined to secure it to his posterity. The antipathies of race and religion were stronger in those days than they are now among the Russians. The absolute Czar,

though he might set up wheels and gibbets for them, could not ask one of his Muscovite nobles to marry the Tartar princess, with any amount of dowry; but the head of the Greek banking house had an only son and heir yet undisposed of in marriage, and Ivan fixed on him as a safe husband for the dangerous heiress.

“Refusal involved a flight from Russia, without time to arrange business or gather in debts and securities, and the confiscation of all that could not be carried off was certain. Compliance secured the monopoly of Eastern commerce, which was now ebbing fast away from Novgorod and Kief, having found new channels in the Levant and the Adriatic. The Palivezi might engross all that remained; might retain their wealth and influence, if not rise to greater, by obeying the Czar’s behest; and as there was no alternative but ruin, these considerations prevailed. The Greek line which had kept its pure Hellenic descent unbroken and unmingled with any foreign strain from the days of Athenian liberty, was linked to the Scythian hordes, and Eusibius Palivez married the last des-

endant of Zingus Khan. You see her picture hanging in my private rooms, beside the veiled Nemesis, a true Tartar face in its ugliness, in its strength, and in the power of the curse with which she smote my family.

“Now, Lucien, I am about to tell you one of those traditions which dignified historians ignore, and sensible biographers reason away, but which are nevertheless the truest part of national or family history. Yermiska, that was the Tartar name of the princess, though they baptized her Helena, in the newly-erected church dedicated to that saint in Kazan, had formed an early attachment to a Calmuck chief, who had fought gallantly for his share of the Crimea, retired with his tribe before the advancing Russians, far eastward, and was said to have ultimately settled on the frontiers of China. His descent was held inferior to her own; I believe the tribe were not orthodox Mahometans either; but there was a vow between them, and Yermiska would fain have retired eastward, too. But, the old chief, her father, would not leave the soil of Kazan and the stone coffins of his ancestors.

“For the sake of remaining there, he consented to her marriage with the Christian trader ; the conquering Czar commanded it ; the Palivezi, father and son—though solemnly warned of the bride’s aversion, by her old confidential nurse, secretly sent to their house under shade of night—held on to the wedding which promised such advantages.

“Yermiska was a Tartar Moslema, accustomed to think of revenge, but never of revolt or disobedience ; and the night before her marriage she deliberately drank a potion, prepared for her by a Calmuck sorceress, famous throughout the north, and known to journey as far as Khamtschatka in her search for plants of power. How, or of what that draught was compounded, the Powers of Darkness best know ; but the Princess declared, and time has proved her statement true, that it would transmit hereditary and irremediable madness to the utmost generation of her descendants.

“You look incredulous, my friend. There are secrets in nature for which the boasted science of Europe has neither name nor place. Among the rank-growing weeds of her fens and marshes, among the wind-sown flowers of her

woods and wilds, there are plants that draw occult influences down from the midnight moon, or up from the nether kingdom, to mingle with their juices, and furnish the skilful searcher with weapons against life and death, never yet matched by your chemists and anatomists. They were known three thousand years ago to necromancers, who sought them out on the plains of Thessaly and the vales of Etruria. Through them they changed men's natures and turned the course of their affections; the love philtres were not all fancies, neither were the tales of Caligula and Domitian.

“From them the Egyptian embalmers drew the gums which fenced their dead against decay, while it fell on successive creeds and dynasties. That knowledge, like all the deeper and higher sorts, has no written records. It cannot be found in books; they contain but the husks and rinds of learning, being meant for the common eye and mind. It exists, nevertheless, among primitive and unlettered races; the African slave and the Hindoo pariah have visited the sins of the fathers upon the Anglo-Saxon families by means similar to those which the unwilling bride employed against mine.

“Strange that such mysterious drugs should be far less powerful to save than to destroy; as it is thought because the plants that bear them grow so near the dead, for the graves of earth’s first inhabitants are in her wastes and wilds. You cannot believe it—the subject is too new to you; we will talk of it hereafter, if there be time; but the night wears, and I must proceed with my weary tale.

“Eusebius Palivez, one of the handsomest men of his time, and one of the wealthiest in Russia, though never able to supersede the Calmuck chief, espoused his Tartar bride, with a pomp which astonished all Kazan, in the church where she had been baptized on the previous day, brought her home to his house in Kief, with splendour and festivity befitting a wealthy Greek of the sixteenth century, and was henceforth established in the favour of the terrible Czar, and in the monopoly of Eastern trade and banking.

“The Princess Helena, as people continued to call her, behaved like a dutiful and prudent wife—though she insisted on having her tirema, or harem apartments, kept strictly separate from the public rooms—wore a thicker veil than

Greek ladies were accustomed to, and never went to church if she could help it. There was great peace, if nothing better, between her and her husband for full thirty years.

“They had three sons and two daughters; the house of Palivez had increased in riches as well as in numbers, when the great plague, which devastated Eastern Europe at the end of the sixteenth century, found its way to Kief, entered their walls in spite of wealth and care, and first lighted on the Princess Helena. The Tartar woman was dying, and she knew it.

“In the middle of the third night, a band of Greek monks stood round her bed; they had come to administer the last sacraments, and see the soul won from Mahomet safe on its last journey; her husband and children stood at the chamber-door—they could venture no nearer the pestilence, though the black cross marked the door, and none might pass out or in. But the daughter of Zingus raised herself with a final effort, looked Eusebius Palivez in the face, and told him, in a tone which all the house could hear, what she had done for him and his posterity the night before her marriage; prayed that the Prophet, in whom her fathers trusted,

might hold the curse over them to their latest generation, struck the Eucharist out of the hand of a horrified monk, and, with a shout of fierce laughter, fell back and died.

“Eusebius Palivez lived to see his hundred and fifth birth-day. He also lived to see the fearful intelligence of that midnight prove true; his eldest son, about the age of fifty, fell, as all the Palivez have, or would have fallen, into strange and hopeless insanity. Up to that time he had been a man of clear intellects, sober, honest habits, and more than common understanding.

“There was no cause of accident or disease the doctors could discover for his madness. It began with an unaccountable loss of memory; Lucien, I hold that faculty to be the hinge on which both life and mind turn. Well, it went from him, as it were, piecemeal, for about six months; and then furious, raging frenzy was suddenly developed.

“I have heard that he killed three keepers within the first year; and the part of the house where they kept him had to be walled up, to prevent his getting out and destroying the entire family. After about seven years of that frantic

state, he gradually sank into imbecility, so grovelling and degraded that the details could only produce disgust.

“I have heard them all, for this was the first case and example of our family misfortune; henceforth it was the sure inheritance of every succeeding Palivez, man or woman—somewhat modified in the latter, but the same in character and duration; for both there was no recovery—no interval; and it always came on at middle age, sooner or later, according to constitution, but never deferred beyond the fiftieth year. You will say it was hereditary in the Princess’s Tartar family, derived, as it was, from barbarous warriors, whose lives had been full of wild excitement, and probably wilder excess.

“That would be a probable and sensible explanation; but I believe in the account handed down to us from Eusebius, her unlucky husband, and my unlucky ancestor. He left a doom hanging over every Palivez, which prudence could not ward off, or wealth bribe away—coming nearer to them year by year, as they grew out of youth into the business and importance of rich and wise men of the world; but there was brave blood among them.

“That wild, fierce stream from the Scythian deserts had met and mingled with that which dyed the sea at Salamis, and made it famous to all time. The Palivez had not the wisdom to foil the Fates by letting the doomed race die out, and others take their place among the world’s gainers and gatherers ; but they had the courage, man after man, to follow the precept and example of the Tartar woman’s youngest son.

“His name was Eusebius, too—a notable name in our family ; it was given to the first that turned Christian, but the priest strongly suspected this Eusebius of Paganism ; some of us were always relapsing that way, you perceive. He saw there was but one escape for our family honour—one mode of concealing our misfortune from the knowledge of the vulgar—and of what misfortune will they not take advantage in one form or other ? Ours was grievous beyond the common, and would bring more than common scorn and shame.

“Lucien, if you are not well enough acquainted with the world to know that that is all our ill luck, however unmerited, brings us from the common herd—and what else are mankind ?

—you may come to learn it in time. Were the heads of our high-born and stainless house to become proverbial as foredoomed madmen? were our stately mansions, to which cities looked for the tokens of their prosperity, and princes came as humble negotiators, to contain walled-up prisons for raving frenzy, or imbecility sunk far below the level of Nebuchadnezzar's punishment? were useless and wretched lives to wear and suffer on with no result but the impediment of business, and the dishonour of our name? Eusebius found a wiser course, and all his descendants have followed it, from one generation to another.

“The inscrutable doom was made known, at fitting time and to the proper person—that is to say, to the nearest heir and evident successor; the duty was bound upon them, and accepted, without one cowardly defaulter, as the time approached and the symptoms became manifest, to remove beyond the bounds of suffering and insanity the man whose days of usefulness and reason were numbered.

“Heir after heir fulfilled that duty to his predecessor, by a sure and rapid poison, compounded for us by one of the same Tartar race

to whom its necessity was owing. Some had courage and judgment enough to act for themselves, some died before the time of the visitation. The daughters of our house were generally sent to convents; the few that were married in Russia brought only suspicion on the family through their misfortune; its cause and consequence were never revealed to them.

“Being Greeks, and men of Eastern business, the Palivezi held women incapable of keeping such a secret—for a secret it was kept within our walls and breasts, at furthest known only to some ancient and trusty servant, like my old Marco, some aged confessor, or discreet abbess. To make its keeping safer, and also to keep the wealth it had gathered from the needy hands of Ivan’s successors, our house removed to Amsterdam.

“The rapidly-rising commerce of that city, at the beginning of the seventeenth century, made it an eligible position for Eastern bankers; and in the grasping, feverish haste of trade, there are covert and shelter for all who have matters to conceal. People have less time or interest to waste in observation of their neighbours’ lives and doings. In Amsterdam we remained, and

flourished, and left our dead—a Greek house of great business, great repute, and singularly-secluded habits, for nearly a hundred years.

“Then the flush of Dutch commerce passed away, leaving the country more quiet and leisure for gossip and remark. We had formed English connexions; the reigning head of our house thought it expedient to become a stranger once more; there was no Greek firm in Dublin, and we had reason to expect special favour at the viceregal court. To Dublin we and our bank removed accordingly; it was in my great-grandfather’s time. There the one Palivezi succeeded the other, and did the ancient office of heir and successor, which has been transmitted through ten generations, till the line has come to its end in me. My father did that duty to his elder brother, Alexis; and I did the same for him eighteen years ago.

“You start, my friend; but I lived in the expectation of it for years before, and have lived in its memory ever since. None but my old servants and you know the fact; you watched with me through the last anniversary night; you are the only friend I ever had, or could have, since then; and you will do the same office for me.

“Perhaps you will despise me. I have despised myself many a time for the weakness which makes me shrink from doing on my own behalf that which I did for my dear and loving father. I have reasoned, striven and sneered against it, but all in vain. The shrinking and the horror remain with me; yet, do me justice, Lucien, it is not want of courage to open the gate of death with my own hand, and walk into its outer darkness. But I mistrust my own firmness of nerve; my own clearness of judgment when the time arrives. Perhaps it is weak not to anticipate its coming, and be beforehand with it; but, like all doomed people, I value the days of respite, and am not willing to part with one of them. If life had been less full of health and vigour, I might have been more willing to cut it short.

“Yet, once more, do not mistake me; with such a doom hanging over it, I am willing to rise and go when the time approaches. That must be soon, and I well know it; but you, my friend, you whom the very Fates brought to me in spite of strangership and distrust; you who have saved my life when it was worth saving; who have heard my secret thoughts; who have

reasoned with and against me, and learned from my lips the tale never before heard but by a Palivez—you will not allow me to fall into that horrible ruin, but do me the greatest and the only service that man can do. It was my father's prophecy that I, the last of his house, would find a friendly hand to requite my obedience to his last wishes.

“Oh! Lucien, but that was hard, not to do, but to think of, when he first told me. I was young then, and had come home from the Greek convent, where I was educated. The daughters of our family had been educated and received as nuns there from the days of Ivan. Our ancestor Eusebius, the same who married to please the Czar, had liberally endowed it for that purpose, and in my time the abbess was one of the Comneni of Trebizond, and one of the best scholars in the North.

“To her I owe my Greek and Latin, perhaps my free thinking too, for she was strong and free of thought, though an abbess. She knew our family secret, and in a manner prepared me for it; not the whole, remember, that was not confided even to our trusty friends in the convents. They knew who had been inmates of

of their back and out-of-the-way rooms from one generation to another ; they knew that none of the rich banking Palivezi lived to old age, but they knew no more. Well, the abbess had taught me to think ; maybe I had a natural turn for that uncommon process.

“ There was a grand-aunt of mine living, if I can call it so, in one of the back cloisters, and a vault for the ladies of our family under the chapel. My father told me the rest when I came home. He had loved me well, Lucien. I was the only child he ever had ; the heiress of his wealth and his misfortune. There was something in our characters too, which drew us closer to each other, in spite of the difference of sex and years, in spite of our different bents of mind, for he was a firm believer in the Christian faith, and I have no worship except for the ancient gods of my race.

“ You look astonished, my friend ; is it so wonderful that the faith of ages and nations, as far as history casts back her lights, believed in the bravest, the wisest, the most famous times of the world, should yet remain among mankind ? I tell you the Pagans did not all die out with Julian the philosopher, whom you call the

Apostate, or with those latest worshippers of Pan in remote woodland villages, from whom the superseded system took its name. Patriarchs of the Greek Church, and cardinals of Rome—wise men who chanced to be kings or chiefs in Christendom, scholars and poets, in the depths of their unwritten thoughts, have recognised in the ever-living, ever-active powers of Nature, the only possible and obvious divinities.

“You cannot receive the doctrine? Well, my friend, we will not dispute upon it. I have the liberality as well as the faith of my Athenian ancestors, who erected an altar to the unknown God; but to return to my father. He loved me well, and he trusted me as man rarely does or can trust in woman. He knew my mind was not of the inferior order, though I had the misfortune to be born a daughter and not a son, and when, after my uncle’s departure, he took to prayers and penances—that was his mode of reconciling himself with our terrible necessity.

“All the Palivezi who were Christians had taken the same method. He confided his business, his mercantile credit, and of course, family honour to me, and bound me by the love I bore

and the obedience I owed him, to see that the misery and degradation of madness should not fall on his life. I did it, Lucien ; and you will do the same for me. It was the service I asked and you promised. By your honour as an Irish gentleman, by your faith as a friend, by the love which I believe you bear me, and which, if it prove true and lasting, will bring us together under happier auspices in some other planet, I charge you to give me the poison within an hour after you first perceive that my intellects are shaken. It is the surest, safest, only way—and, Lucien, you will do it ?”

She held out her hand to me, and I clasped it between my own. It was cold as ice, and we sat for some minutes without speaking.

Her tale had been told so calmly, so clearly, that there was no question for me to ask, no doubt for me to offer. Strange as it was, I felt that it was a true though terrible explanation of all that had puzzled and perplexed me concerning her, and I think that while we sat there with clasped hands I learned something of what people mean by a broken heart. Mine did not break, I suppose. I have lived long since then ; had my share of human cares, hopes, and enjoy-

ments ; but there are times of shipwreck and ruin to the man within, which after-time may cover with new soil and sow with other harvests, as corn grows over battlefields and garden flowers on graves ; yet the ruin and the wreck are there, and tokens of them will turn up at times to sight and memory.

I sat there bowed down and crushed by the great burden her strange misfortunes had laid on me. Doubtless it was my sin or my infatuation—I have thought of it over and over, but cannot settle which—that made me see no other possible course than to do her bidding, and repeat my promise now that the required service was set clearly before me ; and she looked me in the face with those earnest, hopeless, yet confiding eyes of hers, and said—“ Lucien, you will do it ? You will save me ; say you will, and set my mind at rest, for the time is short. Let me know that I can depend on you, and pass the days as easily as I can.”

“ Madame, if nothing else can be done for you, I will do it.”

“ If nothing else, Lucien ! I will not have that *if*. I tell you there is nothing possible. Would all my forefathers have done as they did

for brothers and for parents?—the Palivez were an attached and faithful family, never one of their elders tyrannical or stingy to the young, nor one of the young anxious to get their seniors' places—would all my female relations in households or in convents, if they happened to live long enough, have fallen into the same horror? Ay, Lucien, and our irregular branches—the Palivezi had not many of them, but such things will occur, witness my uncle's children by the Jewess—our misfortune had descended to them, though in an irregular manner.

“Strange that the same thing should have happened to similar offshoots in all our generations. Esthers' elder brother, the man from whose knife you saved me, has been shut up and under keepers for the last fifteen years. I need scarcely tell you that he had made his escape from an asylum at the time, and was restored to it. Esthers himself is peculiar, but I think will not lose his reason, such as it is; and his sister Sally, there is reason for believing—she is my uncle's child, too—has gone into the eclipse, as you saw, and will never come out of it.

“Our family heritage and their mother's in-

temperance have worked strangely on them. I don't know which influence it was that endowed them one and all with such a strong inclination and singular power to penetrate into other people's concerns, but that characterised every one of them. Poor Reuben, the eldest brother, guessed through it, or through his own share in our misfortune—these things cast true though distorted lights on life and its mysteries—that I had some hand in shortening somebody's days. That was all that could be made out from his ravings. Sally heard them, for she could not be kept from visiting him, and began to rave in her turn. Now you know all, my friend; you have promised to serve me, and I will live and die your debtor."

She clasped my hand. Her fingers were growing warm again. Her look was that of one relieved and positively satisfied. I had promised and may it be forgiven me, determined to keep my word, with an additional resolution to take share of the sure and rapid poison, for well I knew that living afterwards would have been impossible. I did not tell her that, but she sat close by me, promised to put the phial into my hands—it was always kept among her

jewellery, hermetically sealed, and in a gold case.

"It passes for a reliquary. I am not sure they don't think we have a chip of the true cross in it," she said, with a scornful smile.

"Why should they not? it is the chief relic in our family, and has been of more genuine service than ever holy chip or bone was, even to the priests."

She told me other particulars. How long the poison could be kept strong and able to do its work—half a century and more. Two generations of the Palivezi had been served from the same phial. The secret of its manufacture descended in a line of Tartar peasants of the Calmuck race, and living in their ancient seats on the borders of the Crimea. The present representative had replenished her reliquary on her last visit to Russia. There was no danger that the mixture was not strong enough.

"You will take charge of it, and see me every day, in the bank or out of it, no matter where. My look and manner will tell you when the time has come. I think I shall be able to tell you myself; and Lucien, by our after-meeting, be true to me in this matter; but I know

your honour—the only genuine article of the kind I ever met with since my father left me—you will be faithful?” I promised once more, and saw the summer daylight creeping in upon us.

“The morning is come,” she said, “how many mornings have I yet to see? Oh! Lucien, it is sometimes hard to think of leaving the night and day; the seasons and the sky. I know I shall come to them again, this is not the end of my life; but there is a Lethe-time between which I cannot understand. It is that which gave rise to all the untenable dogmas from transmigration to purgatory. You do not talk, my friend, and I grow weary. It may seem selfish, but now that you know everything, and have pledged yourself to me, I feel at rest and willing to go there.

“Sleep is stealing over me; it often does so at the dawn of day, however one holds out through the night, and many a night have I been sleepless. By the way, there was a divining dervish, when I was last in Thessaly, who told me I should die in the night and by steel, but I think he was mistaken. Will you bid me good morning? Kiss me, too, my friend, and don’t

forget to see me every day till we part ; come at what hour you will. I will take no more trouble about the world's thoughts or sayings, my time is too short ; only I must take care that you are not compromised with its laws and customs. But we will talk of that again."

I kissed and left her ; walked home through the whitening day, opened my own door, and heard a sound, which I knew to be Rhoda retiring to her own room, so as not to seem anxious and watching for me. What trouble and concern I had been to that kindly sister ! the vague fears and surmises which I had so often laughed and argued down, had banished rest and sleep from her all that night, whilst her worst forebodings were being fulfilled in a manner she could not guess at, and must never know. I had been little company and less comfort to her. Well, she would miss me the less when all was over and she and Melrose Morton were happily settled in Scotland. I had shrunk from that prospect once, because of the solitude it must bring me ; but now it was all my conscience had to rest on regarding Rhoda, and I felt there were worse things in life than being alone.

CHAPTER VIII.

RHODA IS ASKED IN MARRIAGE.

THERE are old legendary tales of men being so changed by extraordinary sights or adventures that they were never the same again, and something of the kind seemed to have passed over me in the course of that night talked away among the jessamine. Between the setting and the rising of the sun my whole world had altered—the hopes, the feelings that went with me to the villa did not come back with me to my own small house and chamber, where I laid myself down, worn out in mind and body, and dreamt the night's talk over again, till the summer sun flashing on my eyes woke me up to the life and business of the day.

They had not changed the outside of things ;

but my world within was no more what it had been. I loved Madame Palivez still, and was bound to her service by will as by promise ; but what a service it was now the tale was told, and the prospect made clear ! However improbable her family secret may seem to those that read my record, I believed it then, and I believe it still.

The thought and experience of after years have convinced me of the truth of her remark —“there are secrets in nature for which the boasted science of Europe has neither name nor place.”

I do not undertake to endorse, much less explain, all her statements on the subject ; but I tell the tale as it was told to me, and whatever may have been the cause, the dreadful effects were known to be inevitable, and I was pledged to be the instrument of her escape. The discovery had opened my eyes to our true positions. As fairy delusions were said to fade and change before the disenchanted sight, so all things about her and my acquaintance with her took a different and a ghastly aspect.

The beauty that had charmed me was still there ; but I knew the doom that hung over it.

The rosy lips which mine had touched, for the first and last time as it proved, the bright eyes and shining hair, were bound for the clay. The wealth and fashion had a background of the churchyard and the grave.

It was true that all lives were so bounded ; but here the sword was seen suspended over the banquet board, and I had the hair to cut. She must have seen it herself for many a year, and to this hour I can neither comprehend nor sufficiently admire the innate strength and courage that made her bear the sight so bravely, and bloom so brightly under it.

My own part in it made me feel myself a doomed man—the cares, the business, the obligations of life lost their value and their hold upon me. What matter about work or provision, repute or appearances, when six months might settle it all ?

My resolution was taken, and would be kept ; may it be passed over among the sins of that desperate time, for my soul had lost its anchor and was drifting away in the storm ! I got careless of everything. The Forbes' troubles and friendship, Melrose Morton's brotherly affection, even my sister's love and care for me ;

and as for the world's thoughts and sayings, they would have passed me like its wind and dust.

I went to the private rooms, and I went to the villa to see her every day, as she had pledged me to do; her presence was still my fairy land, and she Queen Gloriana. Though the flowers had become churchyard grass, the gay dress a shroud, and the gold a coffin-plate, the woman had charms which no discovery, no fate could alter—those of mind and manner.

Her wit, her wisdom, her lively brilliant fancy, and free, fearless thought, had greater power over me than ever, now that all her outward advantages seemed submerged in the coming doom. They brought the conviction and reality of an after-life upon me at times, as prayer or sermon had never done; yet not with a consolatory or purifying force.

I was desperate and dissatisfied, too, even with her; it might be her character was beyond my measurement, for I could never understand how it was that after she had made her revelation, and cast, as it were, half of the doom on me, her mind seemed at ease, her spirits

more equal and higher than I used to find them.

The pleasures and advantages of her position seemed to be enjoyed with greater zest, though in a private manner, for she stayed more at home, and took to art and literature rather than company. I was always received with smiles and welcomes, expected to share her gaiety and enter into her enjoyments.

We were friends nearer and more intimate than we had ever been before ; but there was nothing beyond friendship permitted or even dreamt of. For all her talk about our coming together in some distant planet, the woman showed no signs of caring for me as a man ; that parting kiss when her fearful tale was told was the only familiarity that ever passed between us, and though she had concluded to trouble herself no more about what people said or thought, Madame Palivez kept her state and ceremony as high as ever.

The door from the Greek churchyard was still my enjoined mode of entrance to her residence behind the bank ; Calixi waited for and showed me up to another room when she was occupied with friends or clients, and at

the villa there was never anybody but ourselves.

We did not happen to meet in public; if we had, I am not sure she would not have passed me without recognition as formerly. In short, I thought and fretted under it then, and an after review of all the circumstances has led me to the conclusion that the last of the Palivez having always looked on mankind as subjects to be employed and made use of, had included me, perhaps unconsciously, in the general estimate, preferred only because fit for a special purpose.

It may be I wrong her memory, for the case was hard; but looking back on the time, I can understand the hardened recklessness of men in plague-struck cities or desperate campaigns, and see how much I owe to a preserving Providence that did not send temptations in my way, for I was hopeless and graceless enough for anything.

The summer waned, and the autumn was wearing away in this fashion. Nobody guessed my state of mind; nobody ever guesses at anything so bad. It is probable that my walk and conversation were sober and steady as

they had ever been ; but I was conscious, while doing my work strictly in the bank, of showing something like a general care for nobody, and Esthers appeared to know that I was less to be trifled with than ever.

The manager kept well from me, and I was as willing to dispense with his company. I knew now the cause of his reminding likeness to the ragged man with the knife, and why my chance saying, "I hope it won't happen to you, Mr. Esthers," had frightened him off in Bolton-row. That he knew of my more frequent visits to Madame, that he hated me more in consequence, I could not doubt ; Esthers, as usual, gave no sign, but he was busy about it, nevertheless.

There was another that observed my ways and doings, but with different eyes. Rhoda had learned, by long practice and strange experience, poor girl, to take note of, and wonder in silence at what she might have called the carryings-on of her genteel brother.

She had been watching for my home-coming that night, but did not intend me to know ; she had never referred to my long absence, never asked a question or insinuated her surprise, and

over-occupied with my thoughts, I imagined it had slipped out of her memory ; had she not Melrose Morton to think of? That was the only satisfactory point in all my outlooks.

Melrose had got his uncle's will settled, realized his legacy, parted company with the lawyers, but still remained in Bloomsbury, and came to No. 9 more frequently than ever. I did not wonder what his intentions were, for I knew that with Melrose they were sure to be honourable ; but I would like to hear the question formally asked regarding my fraternal approbation, of which Melrose must have been pretty sure, too, and see the courtship brought to a happy conclusion before my own terrible adventure came on.

It therefore pleased me to find Morton at home one evening before me, seated with Rhoda in our little parlour, then lit up with the first winter fire. They had been talking confidentially ; I guessed that by the flush on Rhoda's cheek, and the fluster in which she got up from beside Melrose to look after the tea, while he thought it necessary like a true Scotchman, to be absorbed in the newspaper he had pulled out

of his pocket the moment I made my appearance.

"Anything new, Melrose?" said I, doing my part of the small disguise.

"Nothing, nothing," said Morton, speaking in a strange, frightened tone; and the horrified expression of his face, as I saw, by the firelight, while he hastily wrapped up the paper and thrust it back into his pocket, made me stand and look at him for a minute without speaking. What could have passed between him and my sister, what could his eye have lit upon in the newspaper that concerned us or him so much? My uncle's death, perhaps. That couldn't frighten Morton: he knew it would not affect me to such an extent. Yet something had troubled and terrified him, something he thought requisite to conceal from me; he rose and walked to the window with his hand still clutching the pocket, looked out into the twilight, and said, "Dear me, I did not think it was so late; I must get home."

"Nonsense," said I; "you will stay with us for the evening. Rhoda has gone off to get the tea."

"No, Lucien, no; if you please, let me go

home. I recollect something I ought to be there for. I am an odd fellow ; an old bachelor, maybe, though I hope not to be so long, if your sister can be persuaded ; but let me go home now, Lucien ; there are particular reasons why I don't want to stay."

"What has upset you, Melrose ? What have you seen in that paper ? Is it my uncle's death ?"

"Oh, no ; nothing of the kind," said Morton, clutching the pocket more firmly ; "your uncle is safe and well, I assure you ; there is nothing at all in the paper—no news. It is only a Dublin 'Saunders' I bought, for old times' sake, coming down the Strand."

"But you have seen something in it that disturbs you, Melrose ; you don't choose to tell me what it is, and I have no right to ask you. If you stay with us, you know you are welcome ; if you would rather go home, I am sorry you think so little of our friendship and society."

"I don't think little of them—I don't indeed, Lucien," he interrupted ; "don't put such a harsh construction on what I can't help ; but let me go quietly, and make my excuses to your sister."

Melrose was out of the room, and out of the street-door before I could offer further question or remonstrance. I saw him walking rapidly away through the deepening twilight, and Rhoda's blank look when she came up and found him gone was the first thing that woke me from my trance of astonishment. "What under goodness took him off?" said the honest girl; "you and he had no words, Lucien?"

"No angry ones, I'll promise you; we had neither time nor occasion," said I. "I saw him pull out a newspaper as I came past the window; and if nothing unpleasant passed between you and him, Rhoda, there must have been something in that paper which disturbed Melrose as I never saw him disturbed before; he thrust it into his pocket that moment, and left the house without giving me any reason except that he must go home."

"Goodness me!" said Rhoda, "what could it be? Nothing onpleasant happened between us, I am sure; nothing of the like ever did. Mr. Morton is a rail gentleman, and always behaves proper; but I'll tell you, Lucien, just for fear you would think there was anything wrong—he was only axing me," and Rhoda

looked down with a very red face, "in the properest and genteelest way to be Mrs. Morton."

"Well, Rhoda, there was certainly nothing wrong in that, and I presume you said yes, or something to the same effect."

"Indeed I did not, Lucien;" and my sister sat down by me, looking suddenly sad and serious. "Mr. Morton has axed me many a time since he got his legacy settled; not that I didn't know that he liked me before that, and I never saw the man I would put before him, he is such a gentleman and a scholar; Watt Wilson is not fit to hold a candle to him."

"And why did not you consent to have him, Rhoda?"

"Well, Lucien, just for two reasons: first, that I didn't like to leave you all alone, for Mr. Morton wants to live in Scotland; I am not of much use to you, maybe—you have carryings on with that bank lady you don't like to trust me with; I don't say they are bad or onproper; but, oh! Lucien, I never knew good come of nothing that was secret and hidden. From the first my mind told me it would have been well you had never gone near her; and Lucien, I can't leave you till you get into some safer and

more settled way. The second reason is a queerer one, I'll allow, but I can't get over it. Mr. Morton is a complete gentleman and scholar; has always behaved proper to me and everybody; made me the finest speeches and the realest of purposals; but, Lucien, there is something about him too that I can't understand. He hates the Forbes'—that is, he keeps off, ay, the very naming of them, Lucien; if he sees Miss Helen on the road coming here, it makes him turn back; I have seen him do it, though she always speaks kindly and friendly of him. I don't like that keeping of a quarrel so long and hot; it is not like his other ways, for Mr. Morton is mighty sensible and a good Christian, though he is a Protestant—a black Presbyterian, as they say in Ireland. I doubt our aunt, poor Miss Livey, wouldn't have been pleased at my thinking of him at all; but there is no bigotry in him; he told me over and over he wouldn't meddle with my religion, though he says it is not all in the Bible. Howsoever, I don't like him hating and keeping off the Forbes', I don't like his never telling me what they quarrelled about, though I tried to get it out of him as often as there's fingers on me—and,

Lucien, I couldn't tell you exactly what makes me think it, but I have a notion, and it won't go out of my head night nor day, that he knows something about our poor lost brother Raymond."

I almost started from my chair, for with my sister's words came rushing back the long ago, half-forgotten time, when I was a child in Baltimore, talking to the kindly usher of the grammar school about Raymond's disappearance; how his hand trembled as it held my tiny fingers, in the steep mossy path beyond the falls; how frightened he looked, and how earnestly he advised me never to speak on the subject!

That Melrose Morton, my earliest friend, the best man of all my acquaintance, the most truthful, the most honourable, of strict religious principles, and moral conduct without stain or flaw—that he could have connived at, or been concerned in the loss which brought such ruin and disgrace upon our family, was not to be imagined for a moment.

Yet Rhoda's words had struck a strange chord in my memory; her warnings against the bank lady had proved that prophetic instinct so often found in honest and simple natures, and might

not that notion which would not go out of her head night nor day have a basis equally true? Something in my look must have apprised her of that.

"What are you thinking of, Lucien?" she cried, flinging her arms about my neck in mingled love and fear—"what are you thinking of? I didn't say for certain that he knowed anything; but, Lucien, he might have seen—he might have heard something; and, maybe, the bank lady knows."

"She does not," said I, clasping to my breast the one true heart that loved me without deceit or purpose to be served, the one that suffered with me under the same unexplained mystery ever recurring to haunt and trouble our days. A disclosure, as terrible as it could be, had for ever cleared my mind of all the unuttered doubts and suspicions which linked Madame Palivez to the memory of my lost brother. "She does not," I repeated; "be sure of that, Rhoda, whatever else you may think of her."

"Lucien, dear, I would think no harm for your sake if I could help it, but no good ever comes out of secrets: tell me now this once, for the love of goodness," and Rhoda's tears were

falling fast upon my breast, "is it all right and nothing wrong between you and her?"

"It is all right, Rhoda," said I; but the false words came with a groan as I thought of my pledged promise, the deadly service to which it bound me, my own consequent doom, and the grief and horror it must bring my sister.

"I hope it is, Lucien, I hope it is," she said, withdrawing her arms, and I saw by her sorrowful but indignant look, that she did not believe me.

"That night you stayed so long at her villa, I could not go to bed, somehow, but I fell asleep on my chair here, darning stockings, and I dreamt she came into the room with Raymond by the hand. I saw them both as plainly as I see you now, Lucien; and woke up in a terrible fright, thinking it was true, for neither of them looked like living people. I crossed myself and I said my prayers, but from that dream I know that we will hear something of Raymond and of her; and I wouldn't have talked about it, only when you were at the bank this morning I got a letter."

"What was it about, Rhoda?" said I, trying to recover my composure.

“ Well, it was just about her and you ; but whether it’s a friend warning, or an enemy trying to frighten us, I am not sure. Anyhow, I kept it in my pocket, but I did not show it to Mr. Morton, you need not be afraid of that ; I would let nobody but yourself see what concerned you and me, now that we are the last of the La Touches ;” and Rhoda took from her secret pocket a large letter, which had been sealed with a foreign crest, and was in a handwriting I had never seen. It was properly addressed to Miss La Touche, No. 9, Petersburg-place, Moscow-road, and commenced—

“ Madame,—I write as a disinterested but friendly stranger, to warn you of the imminent risk and danger which your brother runs in his private connexion with Madame Palivez. The nature of that connexion I say not ; the lady has strange ways, if all reports be true, and no man of an humble station ever had the honour of her intimacy without paying for it, either with his life or his reason. She has had familiar clerks before now ; some of them have died suddenly, some of them are in madhouses. Take the advice of one who knows Madame and her

doings well, but does not think it safe to tell all he knows, and persuade your brother to give up an acquaintance which will lead him only to ruin. A sober, industrious young man like him could find a far better and safer situation than he has in her bank ; there are those who would be well inclined to take him by the hand if he gave it up to-morrow ; he might hear of them at the Old Greek Coffee House in Finsbury, any evening between six and seven, if he mentioned his wish to the head-waiter. As you value your brother's safety and your own future peace of mind, endeavour to open his eyes, and believe me, your sincere well-wisher.

“ A FRIEND TO THE SIMPLE.”

The letter had not been written by Esthers, but its style reminded me of him ; it reminded me also of the Baltic merchant who had been so communicative about Madame's disposed-of clerk, a version of the elder brother's history, by all probabilities. It was written in good English, yet the modes of expression were foreign and constrained.

The Prince whose strong inclinations and poor abilities for intrigue Madame had remarked on,

was evidently busy with his satellites and my ongoings. How much, and yet how little they all knew concerning her ! What a watched and envied man was I for her fatal preference ! Esthers was evidently the chief agent. I told my sister so on the spot, made her understand that he was jealous of my intimacy with Madame, explained that business as well as I could without entering into the depths of it, assured her of my perfect safety, and persuaded her to burn the letter, that it might not disturb her own mind.

“There it goes, Lucien,” said she flinging the paper into the fire ; “I would believe nobody against your word, though I know you are not telling me the whole of it. I can pray that the Lord may watch over you, and keep you from all evil, as I think He will, and then, Lucien, no lasting harm will come to you, let the bank lady be ever so crafty and her manager ever so full of envy.”

CHAPTER IX.

THE SAVING DROPS.

THERE was a Cameronian regiment that went out to help in Dutch William's wars, soon after the Revolution of 1688, and had such a tempestuous passage to Holland as they say no ship ever experienced ; yet all came safe to land.

Their chaplain, who records the fact, of course ascribes the bad weather to witchcraft and prelacy, the acknowledged causes of all that went wrong with Presbyterians in those days ; but he avers that neither the malice of the enemy, nor the waves of the North Sea, could wreck the ship or drown the men for whom so many godly women were praying night and day in Scotland.

So it may have been that my sister's prayers,

though offered on a rosary, were powerful against the tempest and shipwreck of my soul, which seemed so imminent. I had neither faith nor grace enough to value them then; yet not so little of the latter, as to see her troubled on my account without compunction.

Troubled Rhoda was, in spite of my arguments and explanations, which had silenced but not satisfied her. She had burned the anonymous letter; but its contents did not pass out of her memory with the flare of the paper.

I saw her looking after me when I went out, and watching for my home-coming, and I knew she was thinking of the clerks that were said to have been disposed of. Esthers' machinations against myself, had they been ten times as active, would have been disregarded; there was no harm that he could do me with man or woman now. But that his malice and Prince Dashkoff's designs should disturb my sister's peace, were not to be borne.

Madame Palivez had not taken her manager in hand regarding his doings to the Forbes' as she had promised. I had always observed that she was in no haste to interfere with Esthers.

Latterly she never mentioned him, the Notting Hill House people, the Joyces, in short, anything that might be troublesome or serious.


Of all she had told me that night at the villa, I never heard another word ; one would have thought the whole subject had passed out of her memory, and a general taking of matters easily and lightly had supervened as if the lady had nothing to do but amuse herself for the rest of her days. The change was unaccountable, and almost revolting to me.

Was it the securing of a scapegoat that made her sit down so contentedly under her vine and fig-tree, while the terrible prospect came glooming down upon my spirit like night without a star ? I could not understand, yet I durst not rebel against her royalty by word or sign ; that woman would have ruled over my mind long after my heart had gone from her.

I could never think of troubling her with my private affairs ; they always seemed beneath her attention ; and now it was hard to bring her back from the garden of Epicurus to matters that approached the strange and fearful mystery of her life ; but I would speak to her for Rhoda's sake ; she was never wanting in

resources, and could surely find a way to keep the manager and his Russian highness from troubling my sister's mind.

Having summoned up courage for the occasion, that was still requisite in my dealings with Madame, I went to her private residence one morning before the bank-hour. Like all people of Eastern affinity, she was an early riser, though many a night she sat up long enough to meet the day, and then retired to rest till after sunset. It was a cold, grey day in the middle of November; her rooms were all in their winter trim, the Russian stoves in full heat, the conservatory full of bright exotics, and she in her purple velvet, seated in a small, closet-like room, which I had never seen before; it opened from the principal saloon, its door being formed of one of the large mirrors, and not to be distinguished when closed, and its walls were entirely covered with ancient tapestry, on which landscapes and pastoral scenes were worked in the most brilliant colours I ever saw. It had no furniture but one low sofa, very like a Turkish divan, covered with similar tapestry; on it Madame sat, with what I knew to be her private desk open before her.



"Good morning, Lucien," she said looking up from her papers; "you have come just in the nick of time. I have been making my will; my mother's relative, Cuzenes, a Greek jurisconsult here, has taken charge of it, and you will hear its provisions in good time."

"Its provisions do not and ought not to concern me, Madame." I sat down, and said no more.

"They ought, and they do, Lucien. I have little to leave, except my plate and jewellery; but they are worth having, as the world goes; and, with the exception of some legacies to my old servants, whom our successors, the Comenzoni, are not sufficiently bound to provide for, I have left everything to you, of course."

"For Heaven's sake do no such thing, Madame!" Did she mean to bribe me with the price of blood?—"I would not have, and I shall not want, a legacy when you are gone."

"Why so, my friend?" She looked at me with unfeigned surprise.

"Because, Madame, I must go also; I could not survive you and the service to which you have bound me."

"Yes, my friend, you will survive me many

a year, Lucien. I have learned a little of the star-reading—that knowledge which has come down from the wiser races that looked on the heavens before us—and I know that you will live to see gray hairs whitening that black bush of yours.” She smiled on me kindly as she spoke, and continued in the same steady tone—“I know that the time of my own departure is approaching, too; I dreamt of my father last night, and we always dream of the last one that went when our own turn is coming. See, Lucien,” and she took out of the desk a small but beautifully-chased reliquary of fine gold, and, I think, Venetian workmanship; “here are the saving drops. It opens this way;” she pressed a small spring in the lid with her finger; it was a minute rosebud in the wreath which went round the reliquary. It flew open, and I saw a phial, formed like a closed lotus-flower, made of rock-crystal, and full of a clear, colourless liquid, which might have been so much of the purest water for aught the eye could tell. “It has neither smell nor taste,” she said, “but the famous drops of Epaphania, once so renowned in Italy,

were of the same composition, I conjecture."

She looked at the phial and case for a minute, as if contemplating some work of art or vertu, then closed the spring and handed the miniature reliquary to me.

"You will take charge of it, my friend; it is not wanted yet, but will be soon. You have only to pour the contents into a glass of wine or water; with any mixture they would have equal power; unmixed, the effect would be too rapid, and might bring suspicion. When I have drunk, take leave of me and go, for within twelve hours after I will be at rest, and neither coroner, doctor, nor any other of the troublesome institutions with which people's lives and deaths are cumbered, will be able to make out the cause."

I had taken the thing mechanically, and sat there rigid and silent; the horrible duty was so plainly specified, so clearly brought home and entrusted to me, all chance of law and blame judiciously avoided and provided against, and she prophesying the years I was to survive her, and the gray hairs I should

see. I could not tell her then how fixed was my resolution—how impossible it would be for me to live with her death on my hand and memory. There was no help, no hope; I was doomed, and so was she. Yet how calmly the woman arranged her papers, told me she had put all that might concern the Comenzoni safely away for them, and that she had burned at least thousands of private letters!

“Written paper is always sure to tell tales, Lucien; and I will not have people gossiping about my grave more than in my lifetime. What a strange business this death is! The nearer one comes to it, the more inexplicable it seems. I wonder if people get any insight by approaching it through slow sickness, as some of our family, who went young, and by consumption, did? Why do you sit looking on the reliquary, Lucien? Are you afraid to take it home with you? It is true the shining thing might catch your sister’s eye—might rouse her curiosity, and she might find the spring. Better leave it in my desk; it always stands here, and I will give you the key any time you ask me.” She had taken the gold box out of my fingers and replaced it in the secret

drawer before I could answer. "You will know where to find it," she continued, displaying the lock, the key, the spring that was to be pressed, the lid that was to be lifted; "and, Lucien, I know you will not fail me in my extremity."

I don't know what I should have said, but at that moment there was a low tinkle at the door.


"Come in," said Madame.

And, with accustomed reverence, Calixi made his appearance, said something in what I knew to be Romaic—it was the language in which Madame always spoke to her Greek servants—and she turned quickly to me, her face slightly flushing, and her look both vexed and angry.

"Lucien," she said, "it is Esthers. I had intimated my wish to see him in private; the truth is, I want to talk to him about your friends, the Forbes', the annoyance he is giving them, and might give yourself, with the help of his foolish highness and the Baltic merchants he sends about the bank. I had intended to do so for some time, as you know—ought to have done it before now, perhaps; but one puts off disagreeable things till one feels there

is little enough time left for doing any small good to those behind. Well, I thought of it, and sent him my intimation, and I suppose it is the Powers of Mischief that bring the creature just when you are here ; perhaps he guesses it, but he shall ascertain nothing if I can prevent him. It may be weak—it may be foolish, Lucien”—the flush on her cheek grew deeper, and her eyes drooped in positive shame—“ but, somehow, I do not wish that prying, ferreting creature to find you closeted with me, and I don’t want you to go just yet. Will you sit here quietly, while I step into the next room, close the door upon you, and receive him as he deserves ? It is not eavesdropping, for I ask you to stay ; and, Lucien, my nerves are giving signs of failure.”

“ I’ll stay, Madame, here or anywhere ”—is it an honour to me that my loyalty never failed or faltered, strange and bad as the service was ?—“ but before he comes up, just listen,” and I repeated as clearly and briefly as possible, the warning letter to my sister, and my own anxiety that the manager and his colleagues should be kept from troubling her.




“Don’t be in a hurry, my friend,” she said; “Calixi keeps guard on the approaches, and Jews are accustomed to wait.” She made a few necessary inquiries in a calm, composed tone, but with suppressed anger burning in her eyes; then saying, “I should have taken measures earlier,” closed the door on me, rang for Calixi, sent her commands to the Jew, whom I heard coming upstairs just as I had crept close enough to get my own eye to a crevice between the wall and the mirror-frame, conspicuous in the inside of the closet, and manifestly constructed for observing those without.

CHAPTER X.

ESTHERS ADMONISHED.

THE human mind is a strange engine, and in nothing more strange than its swift variations. A few minutes before, I had been so occupied with Madame's reliquary and its deadly purpose, that my sister's cares and concerns had been forgotten, till Esthers' name brought them back ; and now, curiosity to see how the manager and the sovereign lady respectively comported themselves, submerged every other feeling, even that of manly pride, and made me spy upon them through the crevice.

Madame, at least, must have known of its convenience for the purpose, and could not have objected to my making use of it. The opportunity was too much for any curious man to resist ; I saw everything in the next room plainly, and



might have heard plainly, too, if I had ventured to creep close enough ; but the dread of discovery in such a position—which, by the way, a subsequent examination proved to be impossible, the crevice was so well constructed, wide within and narrow without, after the fashion of windows pierced in the thick walls of ancient castles, and so dextrously concealed by the ornamental work on the mirror's frame, that no stranger in the outer room could suspect its existence.

I saw them plainly ; and it was wonderful to see the woman, whose cheek had flushed and eye drooped in manifest confusion at the untimely coming of her manager, seated there in haughty state, like a queen that had the mistakes of her minister to rebuke in private.

I had never seen Esthers alone in her presence before ; from preceding circumstances I had half expected something of airs and insolence ; but no schoolboy brought back from playing truant could have looked more subdued or frightened, as he shuffled into the saloon, and made his bow with awkward humility.

The embarrassment of the trying occasion seemed to have brought positive clownishness on the generally active and business-like manager ;

he muttered something which I could not catch in reply to Madame's "Good morning, Mr. Esthers, please to take a seat," and shuffled away to the farthest corner, where he sat down on the edge of a sofa, rubbed his face with both hands, and looked at the hat he held between his knees. The lady turned her cold, calm eyes upon him—they were just like icicles in the wintry sun by this time—and began—

"Mr. Esthers, I have sent for you to inquire about the account with Forbes' Bank, which was not in its usual place when I had occasion to refer to it on Saturday last, and you were absent from the office, as I have observed you are too frequently of late."

"I was at the synagogue," said Esthers, in a flurried tone.

"No; I am aware you were seen coming out of the bank in Threadneedle-street within the same half hour."

How well she had laid her lines, and how steadily she looked at him! What the manager muttered in reply did not reach my ears, but it evidently gave Madame the key-note of a sound lecture.

She began and delivered it, slowly, coldly, but

in a tone so low-pitched—doubtless that was intentional—that I could hear only the mention of Mr. Forbes and his daughter, my own name, and that of my sister—half words which showed me that we were all spoken of as patronised people whom the bank lady had a general interest in, as far as wishing them well, doing them justice, and having no reflections cast on the house of Palivez by any misconduct of its servants towards them.

The manager was permitted to answer questions and offer apologies in the course of his schooling, and I could see that as it proceeded Esthers' words and looks grew more cowed every moment.

"I don't want to annoy any family, I am sure ; I only went when they asked me, and I don't care for anybody's private affairs—I have troubles enough of my own," came to my ears at intervals, and at last, out of what a thunder-cloud of suppressed rage it seemed to break—"I have been treated like a dog since that La Touche came here."

Madame rose up from her chair, walked straight up to him within a pace or two. I could not see her face, for it was turned to

Esthers ; I could not hear her words, they were spoken in a low, deep voice ; her tones could become as deep as the sea at times. She must have been threatening and commanding. I knew it by the movement of her jewelled hand ; but whatever was said to him, in less than a minute it seemed to settle the manager.

He made no reply, and when Madame stepped back to her seat, I saw him rise up in a nervous tremor, his face white and rigid, but whether with fear or pent-up wrath I could not tell, make a sort of obeisance like respect taken out of a man, and hurry out of the room so quickly that one could scarcely see the door shut behind him.

Madame sat looking at it, and probably listening to his retiring steps for some moments, then the pride and the stateliness relaxed away from her face and figure.

“Poor soul!” I heard her murmur, “he was born to share only in our misfortunes, and will be but the instrument of destiny,” and rising with a long-drawn sigh, she opened the closet door, and looked kindly on me.

I have kept you a prisoner longer than I intended, Lucien. There was a good deal to be

said to Esthers, and one must take some time about such matters. When affairs are delicate and complicated, a certain amount of circumlocution is necessary. But I have said my say, and hope he is sufficiently warned to let you and your friends alone. Yet I did not expect it would have had such an effect upon the creature, to threaten him with his brother and sister's state, which he thinks I had a hand in, and one cannot always disabuse people where the delusion may be serviceable. You saw him, did you not, Lucien?" and she pointed to the crevice.

"Yes, Madame; I could not help looking through."

"Tell me, then, for I know you have some judgment of my manager, was it in fear or in anger he left the room?"

"Upon my honour, Madame, I could not say which."


"No, nor could I. Yet I should like to know. Esthers is a strange creature, and came of strange elements."

How much that consideration seemed to perplex the woman who had prepared for her own expected doom with such calm courage not an hour before. She walked up and down the

saloon, gazed on the place where Esthers had been sitting, and questioned me about his look and manner till I reminded her of what then seemed rational to me, that it was of very little consequence whether the Jew manager were angry or not.

"You are right," she said, "it is a matter of no consequence," and seemed to shake something off her mind, but it was with an effort. "And now, my friend, we have arranged all, you will come and see me every day as regularly as you have done since my case was fairly put into your hands, my best and only physician, and I will not leave London. I am never to leave it again, Lucien.

"Something within tells me so ; yet I find no signs of the approaching evil. It will surely come to me as it came to the rest of the Palivezi ; yet my senses and my intellects remain clear ; that failure of memory has not recurred again. I am nervous, but it is with the dread of it, and also with the feeling that my summons is at hand. Would it be possible that, notwithstanding the health and vigour of my look, some secret disease was at work on the source of life ? I have felt strange tremors about my heart in the



sleepless nights of late. There was one of our house when we lived in Amsterdam, who had the good fortune to be summoned just when the fatal time was drawing on. Lucien, if that should be the case with me, how fortunate to spare your friendship the disagreeable office ! but such good fortune is not to be expected.

“I have had no other adversity wherewith to pay the Nemesis, and I would not regret this if it did not involve another. That thought has gone to my heart like a dagger many a time since we became acquainted, and I saw you were the man to do it ; but you will think of me kindly, Lucien, when I am gone ; as a friend parted from you all these years by a prison grate—bars too strong for mortal hands to move or file away, through which our hearts saw each other, though dimly, for the place was dark, and, as it were, shook hands and gave pledges to be redeemed hereafter.

“Think of me, too, as one who did not attempt to reward your services, because they were not to be bought or paid for, but bound you to the duty for honour and friendship’s sake. It will be no tarnish to these that you inherit what I have no longer use for. You will have earned

my gratitude in the better and longer life to come. We shall still be friends, though parted for a time. You will fulfil the appointed course, which no impending horror will make it best and wisest to cut short; you will unite your days, I know you will, Lucien, with those of Helen Forbes, the only woman worthy of you, in spite of her father's great misfortune. How heavy and black it lays upon the man! but you and she will be happy in spite of it."

"Prince Dashkoff," said Calixi, opening the door at which he had probably knocked without us hearing.

"He must be admitted," she said, and her servant was told something in Greek. "You will have time to go, Lucien, by the church-yard way. I cannot shut you up again. Shake hands with me, my friend."

She clasped my hands with a grasp strong and warm as a soldier might give his comrade when parting for different destinations on a battle field, walked with me through the conservatory, half down the stair, and when I looked back at the church-yard door with an unaccountable wish to stop and talk with her, there she was smiling down through the tall

exotics, and motioning me to go with a gesture as light and playful as a girl of fifteen. For the first time in my life I ventured to disobey her slightest wish, and stood there gazing after her while she swept back one of the long braids that had fallen loose over her brow and tripped away to receive the Russian prince. It was not with my old fervour of admiration or enchantment that I looked; a powerful touch of pity, of grief for her and her woful doom, had come upon my heart as if I had no personal part in it, and the woman and her misfortunes were separated from me for evermore.

But the next moment the thought of all I had pledged myself to came rolling back like the stone of Sisyphus, and I passed through the overgrown forgotten church-yard with a feeling that its quiet tenants slept well, and a half wish, which kept haunting me for days after, that some cross chance or accident might cut my own thread short before I came to see that service.

I had been always punctual in business, on whatever footing I happened to stand with my employers. Now it was getting late in the forenoon, there was work to be done, and Esthers

would wonder what had become of me ; but I could not go back and sit down to the work in the office with those thoughts upon me. I did not care for meeting the manager either, after seeing his penance done in Madame's saloon ; so I strolled through the little back streets between the rear of the bank and Finsbury—nobody there was likely to know or take note of me till the tide within went down—and I emerged on Finsbury Pavement ready to go back to business.

I was just opposite the old Greek Coffee-house, when my eye lighted on Charles Barry lounging at its door, cigar in mouth, hands in pockets, and in the act of nodding in token of friendly recognition to a man who was walking rapidly down the street. My look followed him instinctively, for I could not mistake the Baltic merchant who had taken such an interest in me and my acquaintance with Madame Palivez, and Charles could tell me something about him. I was by my successful rival's side in a minute ; we had always been the best of friends before and after that trip he took to Gravesend, and I suppose my greetings were warmer than usual for Charles threw away his cigar, said it was a

confounded dull day, and asked me to come inside and have something.

"No, thank you," said I, "my time is limited. I left the bank on business, and must go back, of course ; but can you tell me who is that gentleman I saw you nodding to?"

"Oh, he is a Russian of the name of Rukoff—Nicholas Rukoff, I think they call him—an amazingly clever fellow."

"What is his business?" said I.

"Well, I don't know exactly. He is a sort of an agent for some Russian company ; but there is nothing he don't know, private and public, Mr. La Touche ; he has been over the world, east and west ; knows all America, all the Mediterranean towns ; the very heart of China, and all the gaming-tables and spas in Germany. As for London, I think he knows every mouse-hole in it, and everybody's doings."

Barry was evidently warming on the subject. "I can tell you he knows all about yourself and that great bank lady of yours. I am sure I beg your pardon if I have said anything to make you look so angry, Mr. La Touche, but by all accounts she is a queer craft and a deep one. I hope you consider me a friend, at any rate. I

am cousin to the Forbes', though they scarcely please to own me now, as a friend I would advise you to keep a bright look-out; there have been clerks in her bank she was uncommon friendly with before now."

"The Russian has been telling you so," said I.

"Well, he just did," said Barry; "you see he knows Madame Palivez, and he knows Esthers, her manager."

"Are he and the Jew good friends?" I was determined to get the requisite intelligence, whatever nonsense it might come with.

"Oh, the best in the world, always meeting here in a box by themselves; lots to talk over it would appear, but it is all in Russian. Between you and me, Mr. La Touche, I think the Jew has got Rukoff under his fingers a bit. Captain Monico—that's a Mediterranean friend of mine, we got acquainted at Malta, he's a fine fellow, though he speaks nothing but the Lingo Franco, and it was to see him first brought me to this coffee-house—well, the captain tells me he thinks Esthers has lent Rukoff money to dabble in Russian stocks with; it seems he does that now, but he has been at a hundred trades,

and his brother is head courier to that Prince Dashkoff that's courting Madame Palivez, and watched you so well that night at the play.

"Monico thinks he must do something for the Prince too ; I have seen him, that's Rukoff, I mean, coming out of the George Hotel in Piccadilly, where the Prince pleases to stop. They say he is running an enormous bill there, and not over flush of money ; that's the reason, I suppose, Rukoff had to borrow from the Jew ; anyhow, Esthers has him under his fingers, and he is the very man I shouldn't like to have the ordering of me—cold-blooded and crafty as a snake, Mr. La Touche ; am I right ?"


"Pretty nearly," said I ; "but do you think he orders Rukoff ?"

"I think he does, in a manner ; they always meet here ; and though I don't know Russian, it is plain enough that Esthers is asking him questions and giving him commands, and, to my certain knowledge, Rukoff fishes out news for the Jew about my own cousins, the Forbes'."

"How does he contrive to do that, Mr. Barry ?"

"Well, you see, Rukoff is acquainted with Mr. Forbes' head clerk, Watt Wilson is his

name ; Esthers knows him too, but he can't get news out of him ; the clerk knows his man, you see, but he is uncommon fond of making money, and the Russian once managed a speculation in Baltic Stock for him, with wonderful profits, I believe ; it quite introduced Rukoff to all the bank people, and to Forbes himself. My Scotch cousin is an uncommonly cautious man, but the Russian gets to know his affairs before anybody in London ; he told me this very day that Forbes would have a journey north, on account of a bank in Leith that's thought to be shaky, and owes him no trifle. Mr. La Touche, you may take it ill or well, but I tell you what Rukoff says ought to be attended to ; he knows your uncle, and how you and he happened to part in Baltimore ; could have told me all about the Joyces, if I only met him in time ; that would have been a saving for a gentleman, Mr. La Touche, but there is no help for bygones. And he is one of the most obliging fellows under the sun ; when we were perfect strangers, and I had got into a little difficulty with the head-waiter here, he paid off the score in the most gentlemanly manner. Of course I'll return him the money," said Barry,



hitching up his pockets ; “ but these small matters show what is in a man. Long till my Scotch cousins would do the like. He’s obliging and he is clever, Mr. La Touche, and what Rukoff says ought to be attended to.”

“ No doubt it should,” said I, “ but I know my own business better than Mr. Rukoff.” And Barry got the usual assurance that I was Madame Palivez’s clerk, and she my employer, who took no notice of me, except in the way of business, and on account of my uncle, with whom her bank had long and satisfactory dealings. As it was no matter where he went, the unemployed sailor walked with me into Old Broad-street, in time to see Prince Dashkoff’s carriage, with liveried footmen and outriders, dashing away from Madame’s private door ; on which Barry pronounced his decision that it would be a match yet, and I met his friend, the obliging Rukoff, emerging from the office.

Whatever that gentleman’s communications of the ordering Jew had been, I found Esthers in a state of mind which nobody could have expected after the scene in Madame’s saloon. He

was in good spirits, bustling, active, and more civil than I had found him for the last six months. Never did the manager seem more zealous for his business, more careful in the performance of his duties, or with a higher sense of his own authority and importance in the bank, than he showed that day.

To me his good graces seemed entirely restored; he bade me good morning in a most friendly manner, hoped it was not illness that made me so late—I was generally so punctual and regular. I assured him it was only family matters that detained me, hoped he had not found my absence inconvenient, and professed myself ready to make up for it by extra attention to business.

“Oh, you are always attentive,” said Esthers; “we never had an English clerk so much to be depended on; in fact, Mr. La Touche, I wonder your uncle ever parted with you; you would have been such a help and such a comfort to him in his old days. They do say that widow’s son is getting quite grand in Baltimore on his money, and the prospect of stepping into the old man’s shoes. Your sister is not unwell, I hope, Mr. La Touche?” Esthers kept his eyes on the paper

before him, but the voice told me he was anxious to know the cause of my delay, and I responded, "Oh no, thank you, she is quite well; it was only some household accounts that were to settle; my sister is not an adept in those matters."

The story went down, for Esthers looked up quite relieved and brisk. "Well, I am glad you came any time to-day, or I should have been obliged to send for you. It is necessary for me"—how convinced of his own grandeur he looked—"absolutely necessary for me to set out for Dublin to-night; there are matters very important, to the bank, I mean, which demand my immediate presence. The news arrived only last night; Madame sent for me this morning as soon as she got up, I may say; we were consulting together all the forenoon."

I had seen them consulting through the crevice in the closet door; little more than an hour had elapsed since then, yet Esthers spoke with such confidence and complacency, that I felt persuaded reasons of business had obtained him a more gracious interview and warranted his being sent to Ireland on bank affairs.

There was no time and opportunity to inquire into the truth of that persuasion; all the manager's movements made it appear correct; he put everything in order for his intended absence, gave me more minute directions than were requisite, and frequently recurred to the propriety and necessity of my being in the office at the usual hour next day. I promised to be in punctual attendance. The manager's friendliness was so remarkable, and apparently so sincere, that I believed Madame's rebukes and admonitions had taken full effect, and marvelled at the peculiar subjugation in which she held the hard-witted and cunning Jew.

CHAPTER XI.

STRANGE SCENES IN TWO HOUSES.

THE work of the short winter day was over, all things had been arranged for the manager's departure. I left him in the office, for it was his duty, and one he never skirked, to see the bank closed for the night, and took my homeward way, secure that Madame would tell me the why and wherefore he went to Dublin when I visited her next morning. I had got into Threadneedle-street, and was looking for a coach, for I felt uncommonly tired of that day's work, when somebody tapped me on the shoulder, and there was Watt Wilson with, "I beg your pardon, Mr. La Touche, but I have been laying wait for you in a manner. There is a person in Mr. Forbes' office—it's Miss Helen," he whispered, "would be very glad to

see you for a minute before you go home." Miss Helen in her father's office at that hour, and wishing to see me! "Is there anything wrong with Mr. Forbes?" I inquired.

"Well, no, nothing very wrong, that I know of," said Wilson, "but he is not well, poor gentleman; has not been much at the bank for two or three days, and don't look himself at all. Between ourselves, Mr. La Touche, there is something very particular troubling his mind and Miss Helen's too; yet I understand he means to start for Scotland to-morrow, on account of that Leith bank; you have heard what is said about it, I'll warrant, and our accounts are heavy, to the tune of near four thousand. It would be too much to lose; but Mr. Forbes is rich enough to stand it, and I don't think it ought to trouble him and Miss Helen so much, with all their good sense, not to speak of religion."

As Wilson came to that conclusion we reached the bank door: it was open, for they did business later there than in Broad-street, and the head clerk showed me to Mr. Forbes' private office, a small dingy room, in which the fire never burned well; it was smouldering and

smoking away as usual, and the oil-lamp (for gas was not yet in prudent establishments) cast a dim, hazy light on the dusty furniture, the bundled-up papers, and the slight figure of Helen Forbes in her brown dress, dark shawl, and ribbonless bonnet, seated at the table, and trying to look composed and dignified, as became the master's daughter. Yet the first glance I got of her convinced me there was something wrong beyond Watt Wilson's knowing ; her look was worn and haggard, like that of one who had not slept for nights, and the hand she extended to me trembled like an aspen leaf.

"It is very good of you to come this way, Mr. La Touche," she said, when the prudent clerk, knowing there was something to be spoken in private to the family friend, quietly closed the door and left us alone, "and it was very bold of me to send for you in such a manner ; it is bold to ask what I am going to do. I could ask it from nobody else ; but you have been always friendly, and it is for my father's sake."

"It is my duty as well as my pleasure to do anything you wish, Miss Forbes ; tell me at

once what it is, how I can serve you ;” and I sat down by her side like a brother.

“ Well,” she said, bracing up her spirits for the effort, “ I want you to go to Scotland with my father. You will think it a strange request, for anybody would ; but oh, Mr. La Touche, he is not in a fit state to travel by himself. I can’t understand it ; I am afraid his mind is affected ; he is not what he used to be—mere trifles upset him : for the last three days he seems to be going out of his judgment.”

The patient, self-controlled woman was by this time crying like a child ; it would have melted the heart of a stone to see the tears streaming down her pale face, and her thin hands wringing in the paroxysm of grief she could not restrain.

“ My dear Miss Forbes !” I flung my arm round her, and laid her head on my shoulder : it was the act of a friend and a brother. Helen seemed to know it as such, and did not move away, but leant there, sobbing and crying like a child on its mother’s breast.

“ What makes you grieve yourself so unnecessarily ; what makes you imagine the like ;

has Esthers been at his work again? I should like to shoot that fellow."

"Oh no, no; don't say that; it is not his fault: my father gets upset by such trifles. They were in the library together on Tuesday last, and Mr. Esthers showed him something in a Dublin newspaper he had got; I don't know what it was, for I was not there, and papa will not tell me, only that it does not concern his business at all; yet ever since he has been so strange—can't mind anything, can't rest by day or night; never goes to bed without a light burning in his room, and he don't sleep at all, for all night long I hear him groaning and praying. Oh, Mr. La Touche, he must be going out of his mind, what shall I do?" she cried, with another wild burst of weeping.

I don't know what I said; no man could remember his words spoken at such a time; but with my astonishment at her tale, and pity for the grieving daughter, there was mingled the recollection of Melrose Morton's face when he looked up from the Dublin *Saunders* in our parlour firelight, and found he had particular reasons for going home directly. I had not seen Melrose since; in all my walks I had

looked for a *Saunders' News Letter*, bought three different copies, but could see nothing in them so to upset my friend. There must have been something, however, which appealed to a secret place in the Scotch banker's memory as well as to his, and I felt convinced it had to do with the subject of their mysterious quarrel. There was no use in mentioning that matter to Helen; she was as much in the dark as myself regarding the cause of the dispute. It must have been serious and compromising too, yet Esthers guessed at it, so did Madame Palivez; would her commands keep the Jew from future meddling? I believed so, and comforted Helen as best I could with assurances that her father's judgment was safe, that everything was liable to be upset by matters small in themselves, but connected with sad or unlucky memories. Mr. Forbes lived too retired, paid too close attention to business, was far too charitable and forbearing with such a creature as Esthers, who did nothing but probe into other people's affairs and troubles for his own paltry ends. But Madame Palivez should hear of it; I would take that upon myself without the smallest mention of Miss Forbes or her father's name.

"Oh, if you would," said poor Helen, turning her face to me with such a glow of gratitude that that my caution lost its hold.

"The business is done already, Miss Forbes ; by my certain knowledge, Esthers got such a lecture this morning as will keep him from meddling into matters that don't concern him for some time."

"The Lord reward her and you !" Helen's hands were clasped, and her eyes cast upward with such a look of earnest prayer as must have brought down a blessing on any other hand ; but the golden reliquary and the crystal chalice came up to my memory as she spoke, and the benediction fell powerless. "It was kind, it was noble of her to interfere for us, and noble of you to ask her without ever being asked yourself. I always knew there was something generous and good about Madame, whatever strange ways she might have ; and you, Mr. La Touche, you have been always our friend ; if we had taken your advice the Jew would never have meddled about us, and papa might not have been so troubled. I am sure he has made him worse ; but I am spending your time and my own shamefully," said Helen, wiping her eyes ; "it

is my weakness and sinfulness, no doubt, that make me stand the trial so badly, for, like all other afflictions, it is appointed by eternal wisdom for our good and purifying.

“But let me come to the subject on which I sent for you: can you, will you go to Scotland with my father? He must and will go to look after his accounts with the Leith bank, which they say is not quite safe. I can’t think of his travelling alone; he won’t let me go with him, he won’t let Wilson; in short, he won’t have anybody but you. It was himself suggested that at first, and yet, Mr. La Touche, I had such work to get his consent before I would ask you; one moment he was for it, the next quite against it, and it was only this evening at the last hour that I could get his leave to come here and send for you, for he told me a hundred times it was a thing he could not ask himself, and he was afraid of Esthers knowing anything about it; the manager might offer to go, you know,” and Helen shuddered in her chair at the very thought.

I could not terrify her further by mentioning that Esthers had got the news of her father’s intended journey from his emissary Rukoff; but

my own engagement to see Madame Palivez every day made me answer, "I should think it, a small matter to travel with your father to Scotland or anywhere else, if my time were at my own disposal."

"Oh, that is just what we thought," said Helen; "and I suppose you will think me very forward, but I left home with the intention of going to ask Madame Palivez myself, if you were willing. I should not be afraid to ask anything in reason from that noble lady, and I am sure she would not refuse to let you go to Scotland with a friend too weak to travel by himself."

I had revolved the whole subject in my mind by this time, and I don't know if it should be called cowardly or not, but my wish to serve Mr. Forbes and his daughter was mingled with a vague hope that thereby something might happen to take me out of the way of the darker service to which I was pledged and bound. At any rate, it would never do to let Helen ask leave for me under the circumstances. Better to go myself, explain matters fully to Madame, and be guided by her wish that I should go or stay.

"You might not be afraid, Miss Forbes ; Madame Palivez is both generous and considerate, but particular reasons make it difficult for me to be spared from the bank just now ; I am the only English clerk, and Esthers is going to Ireland by the Dublin packet that sails at ten this evening ; so there is no danger of him offering to go with your father."

"What can he be going to do in Ireland ?" said Helen, fearfully, as if she were thinking of the *Saunders*.

"Oh, it is only bank business ; but when does your father think of setting out ?"

"By the northern mail ; it goes at seven in the morning."

"To-morrow !" said I, amazed at the short time allowed me for thought or leave-getting.

"Yes," said poor Helen, and a slight flush rose on her thin cheek ; "the time is shamefully short, but you can have linens and everything you want from our house ; and I could not get papa's consent a moment sooner."

If one goes to do a service, there is nothing like doing it heartily, and without raising its price.

"If Madame can spare me, I know she will,"

said I; "and it would be more suitable for myself to ask than put you to that trouble. She may be engaged with company at this hour; give me five minutes to write a note here. I will try to get it delivered into her hands, if it is not convenient to see her, and come back with an answer in good time to see you home."


Helen thanked and praised me till I had to stop her with the usual account of how much I and my family owed to her father. I lost no time in putting plainly on the paper her request, and the reasons of it, as far as I knew them; intimated my obligations to the Forbes', and at the same time my resolution not to break through the arrangement Madame had made with me, except she thought it expedient, and craved an immediate answer, as time pressed.

With this billet sealed, and endorsed "Private and important," I started for Old Broad-street, telling Helen to wait my return, and promising not to be long. The evening quiet which falls on that seat of Eastern business was even more marked than it is now: every office was shut, all the people gone or withdrawn into the interiors, a few oil-lamps at wide intervals glimmered through the misty night, which had by

this time fallen, and a solitary watchman, specially retained for that purpose, and armed with his old-fashioned staff and lantern, paced up and down in front of the Palivez bank.

Its doors and windows were fast shut up and barred ; there was not a better secured house in the City. But I went at once to the private door, and, after knocking twice, was admitted by the porter. My request to see Mádame Palivez was as usual answered by the appearance of Calixi ; but he solemnly assured the Signor that Madame had already retired to her chamber, and, if the note were in haste, there was no use in giving him charge of it, as, according to the rule of the house, nobody but Madame Oniga or the maids could approach her sleeping apartment.

I was not prepared for that piece of Eastern etiquette ; but knowing the rules of the house to be like the laws of the Medes and Persians, I attempted no persuasion, but bent my steps to the door of the sunk flat, where the Russian housekeeper was sure to be found. There had been uninterrupted civility between her and myself ever since my coming to the bank ; and I had no doubt that if I went down quietly and



made my wishes known, she would do all in her power to further them.

Down I went on tiptoe; there was no sound to be heard, no light to be seen, though I found the outer door open as if by some neglect, unusual under Madame Oniga's administration, and stepped into the passage beyond. Nobody yet to be heard or seen. I stood for a moment, unwilling to knock or call—it was not my policy to attract the attention of the household—when a dreary, monotonous sound from the other end of the passage struck my ear. It resembled nothing that ever I heard but the chant which came up with the smoke of incense from the lower apartments of Madame's villa on the night of Christmas Eve.

An irresistible curiosity made me follow the sound, and a faint light streaming from a half-open door at the end of the passage at length cleared up the mystery, for there, in a small vaulted room, with a miniature altar, a Greek crucifix, and some undistinguishable paintings, half-hidden by a sort of carved wooden screen, was Madame Oniga and all the female servants of the house on their knees, and almost on their faces, while the housekeeper read, or rather

chanted, from a large black book — what I guessed to be some prayers from the Greek Liturgy, in the old Slavonic tongue, which all devout Russians consider sacred to religion. The household were at their evening prayer, and it would be imprudent as well as improper to disturb them.

I crept softly away, my eyes now accustomed to the darkness of the passage, and my steps, which were always light for a man, rendered inaudible by the Indian matting, with which the entire house was coated for the winter.

Every turn of the place was well known to me, and I was in no danger of discovery ; the clerks were all in their rooms above—most of them retired early, and those who did not were sure to be smoking in the common room. I reached the foot of the stair which led up to the ground-floor, and stepped up a little way, so as not to be seen spying on the household in their private chapel, but there was light above also ; a broad bright gleam flashed along the passage from the direction of the bank.

Who could be there, when it was all shut up and silent ? I crept up and along the passage, the gleam still guiding me, till I saw it

came from Esthers' office. What could the manager be about so late? The door was perfectly ajar, and there was a convenient angle in which one could stand in the darkness and look right into the room. I stood and looked, for my curiosity regarding the ferreting Jew was boundless.

He was seated in front of his own desk, on one of the highest chairs; his face was working like a gathering storm-cloud; his lips were moving rapidly, but no sound came from them; the long, brown, skinny fingers were in rapid motion, telling his arguments or commands to one no other voice could reach, for, on a low stool, almost at his feet, but with her face turned towards him, and her hands in motion, equal to his own, sat Hannah Clark. While the rest of the household knelt at their evening prayer, she had stolen away, unmissed and unobserved, to converse with the Jew.

Hannah had as little part in Madame Oniga's Greek Liturgy as she had in our Roman Mass; but there was an influence which could reach the sealed-up springs of her life and thought—a tutor who knew how to send his instructions home to her voiceless mind.

How eagerly her eyes followed every movement of his face or hands! How keenly she seemed to comprehend every tittle of the tale he told her—for a tale it was, a long rehearsal of circumstances, and not pleasant ones, which must have concerned himself—Esthers was far too much in earnest for it to concern anybody else.

What summary of wrath and wrong was he disclosing to Hannah, and for what purpose? Had it been uttered in words, though in the lowest whisper, I must have caught its import, from my position and the deep silence of the house. No man knows what sort of learning he may find most useful. I would have given my knowledge of French and Latin at that moment to have been able to read the signs that passed so rapidly between them, for the look of rehearsed injury in Esthers' face was answered by the fierce blaze of savage temper in Hannah's eyes. Whatever was his tale, she sympathized with the Jew in her own wild fashion.

I looked in at the open door, and could make nothing more of it; but at last the manager's look grew crafty and insinuating; he bent towards Hannah as if asking her to do

something for him, and pointed away to the back part of the house. She seemed to comprehend his meaning as a dog does that of his master, but there was instinctive cunning as well as obedience in her look; she rose up slowly to her feet, made a sign as if demanding some pledge or promise from him. Esthers directly held up one of his fingers, and made a motion like putting on a ring.

That appeared to satisfy Hannah, but her answering sign completely puzzled me; it was a gesture quiet and deliberate, and resembled nothing that I could imagine but the act of killing a chicken. Could it be that Esthers got himself privately served with delicacies through the devotedness of the dumb girl? Could that be all they signed about so earnestly, and took such peculiar times to meet for?

Suddenly a sound below, which I could not catch, seemed to startle the manager; he gave Hannah a signal, at which she retreated so quickly and noiselessly, that though her clothes almost brushed mine, she was down the stair, and probably in the chapel; while Esthers, ever careful of his own security, closed the office door with equal silence and celerity, and thus left me

a chance of stealing down in my turn ; and I had just got a suitable station at the outer door, when the movements and lights within warned me that the household devotions were over.

I rang the door-bell gently, and Madame Oniga herself appeared, candle in hand. My apologies were soon made, and my business explained ; the strict housekeeper was annoyed to see the door left open, but she did not scold in my presence.

I am not sure that Madame Oniga ever scolded—the discipline of that house was all on the silent system ; but she said something in Russian to one of the maids, who seemed considerably frightened ; told me she was sorry I had been kept waiting — they had been at prayer, and she was afraid Madame Palivez had gone to sleep, but she would send the note up to her by Hannah Clark, whom Madame liked best to come into her chamber, because she was a mute ; Madame always liked mutes, and Hannah had grown so useful and intelligent.

Hannah was immediately summoned from the interior ; the Russian maid seemed to find no difficulty in speaking to her—signs were in more common use with them than in English

families—and it was curious to see the ready, cheerful way in which she recognised me, received Madame Oniga's wordless commands, took the note and tripped away to the farther end of the passage, from which a stair, with a door at the top, led into the central court, on which the bank lady's private rooms all opened.

“Hannah knows every step and turn in the house, if it were pitch dark,” said Madame Oniga, as I involuntarily looked after her retiring figure, and thought of the scene I had witnessed in Esthers' office.

It was no time to put the discreet housekeeper on her guard concerning their intimacy; the maids were moving about, and I was waiting for Madame Palivez's decision to go back to Threadneedle-street and tell Helen Forbes. I did not wait long; Hannah came back in a few minutes and put into my hand her mistress's card, on the back of which was written, evidently by a drowsy hand, “Go, by all means; good night, and a good journey.”

People accustomed to great power, or wealth—which is much the same thing—are apt to make everybody serve the feelings of the hour,

Madame would not abridge her early sleep with detail or explanation, but she allowed me to go ; that was enough, and I hastened back to Helen. How earnestly inquisitive the poor girl looked at me as I opened the door !

"Madame Palivez has given me permission to go," said I.

"I knew she would, the noble, generous lady !" and Helen's eyes spoke more gratitude than her words. "You didn't let Mr. Esthers know anything?"

"Not a syllable. But it is late, my dear Miss Forbes ; let me call a hackney coach, and take you home."

The hackney coach was called, and home we went, leaving the trusty Watt Wilson to make the bank secure for the night. Helen seemed to feel herself and her father safe, since I could go with him to Scotland, but the considerate lady insisted on my sleeping at Notting Hill House, so as not to disturb my own by getting up so early in the morning, and left me at No. 9 to tell my sister, while she drove on to let her father know that he might expect me to supper. Rhoda had been taken into confidence on the subject of my going to Scotland. The friend-

ship between her and Helen had been a matter of slow and steady growth, and seemed to have increased as troubles thickened about Notting Hill House.

“She was here for nearly three hours, talking and telling me all about it. So humble and Christian-like, and so bothered, at the same time, I can’t make it out, and I suppose I never will, Lucien. It can’t be all that Jew’s doing, but he has done a share of it. I am glad that you are going with Mr. Forbes. It will be cold work travelling there in this winter-time, but in course it’s your duty, and Lucien, dear, if he loses a day in the week, or his wits goes a wool-gathering, you’ll fetch him home safe, though I hope nothing of the kind ’ll happen; but one don’t know what to make out of Miss Helen’s talk about him. She is a good young lady, and uncommon sensible,” continued my sister all the while helping to pack my pormanteau, “but she is going to do one thing I don’t like—maybe, it is wrong to say so, and I’ll warrant she didn’t tell you, thinking the mention of her name might be onpleasant—oh! she is the rale Christian—that’s the taking of Rosanna Joyce, Mrs. Barry, I mean, to keep her company when her

father's away. You see Rosanna has been there, tellin' all her misfortunes. Barry is not behaving himself well, never staying at home with her at all, but going, goodness or somebody else, knows where, after bad company, she thinks. Jeremy has taken on with a young woman in a pastry shop, now that Sally is not there to keep him in order. Rosanna's left all alone in the evenings, and short of money, too, and Miss Forbes, partly out of charity, and partly because she will be lonely and narvous, I suppose, after her father, is going to take her for the time to be a companion. She thinks it will bring Barry to the house, and then Miss Helen will give him good advices, I'll be bound; but Rosanna's crafty, and a sort of relation to the Jew villain; in short, Lucien, I think it might be just as well if Miss Forbes would let her stay in Bolton-row."

"Well, Rhoda, we can't interfere in that," said I. "Rosanna can do no harm in Notting Hill House. It is not likely she would be inclined to do any, having no interest to serve; Esthers is going to Ireland on bank business, and will very likely be out of the way till we come back."

"Thank goodness," said Rhoda. "If somebody would lock him up somewhere there, it would be an uncommon good thing, but the like of him always gets home safe. So will you, Lucien dear, I hope, and poor Mr. Forbes. Was it not strange that something out of a newspaper upset him as well as Mr. Morton? I wonder if it was the same paper, or if——" here Rhoda looked into the shirts she was packing.

"They are both losing a day in the week," said I. "Have you seen Morton since, Rhoda?"

"Indeed I have not, Lucien. Maybe he is offended at my putting him off so often, and won't come any more. Just as he pleases," said Rhoda: but the tears were coming into her eyes. "Gentlemen that is so easy affronted are not worth bothering one's self about, I am sure."

"Melrose will come back, Rhoda. Something in that unlucky paper has disturbed both Mr. Forbes and him. I can't understand it, but I suppose it has to do with their quarrel; but he is an honest man and a true lover not to be offended or put off by trifles. He will come

back, and you'll have him, my girl," and I clapped my sister on the back and rattled on about dancing at her wedding, and going to see them in Scotland.

It was the best way of keeping her off my private affairs, for the thought of her brother getting away so long and far from Madame Palivez had opened springs of wonder, and I thought of hope in Rhoda's mind, though she got no farther than how good it was of the bank lady to let me go, and her manager starting for Dublin.

We parted as we ever did, with fond and kind leave-taking. I promised to write as soon as I reached Edinburgh; to take care of Mr. Forbes; to take care of myself, and come back as quickly as the business would allow.

Rhoda gave me all manner of Irish prayers and blessings; said she had a notion that everything was going to turn out right and go well with us all; that we were coming to the clearing-up of our family troubles.

Dreams and omens in which I had no faith had impressed that belief on my sister; and, glad of any illusion that might cheer her heart

for the time, though it made the fatal secret press more heavily on my own, I left her with a pretence of believing too, and strode away through the dull November night to Notting Hill House.

CHAPTER XII.

THE JOURNEY NORTHWARD.

MR. FORBES and Helen were waiting for me at the supper-table. They were sitting close together; had evidently talked the matter over, and her relieved look was a comfort to see. The banker was, I must confess, contrary to my expectation, as composed and sensible as I had ever found him, but looking very ill, and it seemed to me that the man's health was shaken rather than his mind.

His Scottish face was positively gaunt with thinness; the cheeks were hollow, the eyes were sunken, and he had a hard, dry cough at intervals which did not tell of a sound chest. It was a wonder that he thought of going northward under the circumstances, and did not send Watt Wilson or some deputy he could trust.

I would have offered my own services, but I knew that rich men were always most anxious in affairs of property, and it might appear to be taking too much on myself. Mr. Forbes thanked me with his usual grave courtesy for bearing him company on so short a notice, acknowledged his obligations to Madame Palivez for allowing me to go—she was always generous and considerate, whatever else people might say of her. He wouldn't have troubled Madame or me on the subject, but to satisfy Helen.

She would not hear of him going to Scotland alone—good girl, she couldn't leave her father to the care of Providence, without whom a sparrow could not fall.

Of course it was requisite for him to look after his accounts with the Leith bank. I had doubtless heard the rumours about it, not that he placed much reliance on the like. Idle or interested people could always get up reports against a firm, and they had much to answer for who originated or put them in circulation. He knew I was not the man to assist in spreading such reports. Good sense and discretion, not to speak of Christian principle, should keep any rational tongue from that employment. It

had brought many a house to ruin or worse ; and Forbes looked as earnest as if there were a danger of rumours getting up against the establishment in Threadneedle-street.

I had often heard him speak in that strain before. It was part of his scrupulous and conscientious practice to take special care of his neighbours' repute, either in character or business, and all his converse was equally grave and sensible ; nothing odd, nothing peculiar in his manner that I could remark, except that at times he seemed occupied and absorbed in some subject of private thought, which I concluded was the Leith bank, and its bearings on his own.

After supper we had prayers, according to custom. Forbes conducted his family devotions with as much propriety and earnestness as ever I saw him exhibit. There was no perturbation of the banker's mind, that I could observe, on matters temporal and spiritual. How did Helen's fears of its soundness originate? She was not in the habit of taking fancies. I had looked at her two or three times with an assurance that all was right.


I knew she understood me, and seemed to

have got herself into that persuasion when we parted for the night. The sober and trusty footman marched before me with two wax candles to my room—a low-ceiled chamber of that old-fashioned house, comfortably and even handsomely furnished. What a contrast it was to Forbes' own, with a bright fire blazing in the grate, hangings of blue damask, and every appurtenance for sleeping and rising! The footman promised to call me at half-past five. It would take some time to get to the mail. Passengers generally took their seats in front of the Post-Office then, and two places had been secured the previous evening before consulting me, as Helen insisted somebody must travel with her father.

It was all hastily arranged, but pretty well. I thought so, and fell asleep in the richly-hung bed, but it was only to dream the silent scene I had witnessed in Esthers' office. Hannah Clark and he were there, signing to each other; and, strange are the illusions of sleep, there they were talking, too. I could hear them where I stood in the dark corner of the passage. It was all about and against Madame Palivez—vague, indistinct charges of her evil doings to Esthers

—chiefly that she was keeping him out of his lawful inheritance, the wealth and business of the house, willing it away to strangers; that she had driven his brother and sister mad by witchcraft; that she was keeping Helen Forbes from marrying him, and turning her affections to me.

Then their talk became low—a perfect mutter. Hannah's voice in it was like the noise she used to make in No. 9, but sunk to a whispered growl; Esthers was gnashing his teeth and growling too, in a suppressed frenzy of wrath and revenge, it seemed. I could catch no words, but at length I saw him take from his pocket a knife—it was exactly like that with which the ragged man had lunged at Madame in the woodland path, only it opened and shut like a razor. I saw him show Hannah the spring; she tried the sharpness of the edge, clutched the handle, and flew past me down the stairs. I tried to catch hold of her to follow her, but I could not—something kept me fixed in the corner. I tried to cry out and alarm the house, for a fearful sense of danger to Madame Palivez pressed on me, but I could utter no sound. Esthers came out and laughed at me with a



mad scorn, something like his look when he talked of my friendship with the Forbes' on the road that Sunday evening.

Then I heard Helen calling for help somewhere in the office behind him, and woke up to hear the sober footman knocking at my door two hours before the dawn of the winter's day, and knew that it was all a nightmare!

Early as it was, I found Helen at the breakfast-table, in her neat, plain morning dress, not a pin wrong, not a hair out of place. They were used to early rising in that house, generally dressed by candle-light in winter, and she could never think of her father sitting down to breakfast without her. The banker was looking exactly as he had looked the night before, as composed and as sensible. After breakfast we had prayers; no journey or exigency was ever allowed to infringe on the spiritual exercises of the household.

The hackney coach to take us to the northern mail was punctually at the door, Mr. Forbes first shook hands with, and then kissed his daughter, looking sad and solemn all the time.

"Good-bye, dear father," she said, twining her arms about his neck; "take care of yourself,

for my sake, and try to shake off those miserable fancies ;” the last words were in a low tone, and there was something more I could not hear.

“ God bless and keep my Helen,” said Forbes, as he moved away from her and went downstairs.

I had shaken hands and bidden her good-morning, and was going down too, but Helen followed me.

“ You will be kind to him—you’ll take care of him, Mr. La Touche, I know you will, and if he fall into those melancholy notions again, you’ll understand it is only just the effect of old sorrows and an over-tender conscience maybe ; I don’t know ; but you’ll do what you can to cheer him up, and I will rest content, knowing he will be safe with you.”

“ You may depend on that, Miss Forbes, whatever I can do to serve your father’s business or support his spirits, will be done with all my heart.”

“ Come along, Lucien,” said the banker, from below, “ we shall be late for the mail.”

I raised the thin hand that still clung to mine and pressed it to my lips. How

beautiful she looked in the mingled flush and smile that overspread her face, in the earnest gaze of prayer and blessing with which she looked after us in the lamplight, which shone from the hall-door on the drizzling night, as we drove away to St. Martin's-le-Grand!

It is strange to look back from these railway times and see in one's memory the crowd of coaches, the concourse of passengers and attendants, the hurry, bustle and noise which then surged about the General Post Office at the mail hours, and about the notable inns and stage stations in other parts of London. The world of travellers is all changed since then. How much of public as well as private interest a man contrives to outlive within seventy years!

Mr. Forbes and I found our places and took them; he had previously explained to me that we should go no farther than Carlisle with the mail, the nature of his business northward made it necessary for him to call at Glasgow before proceeding to Leith. I believe there was a branch of the bank there, and Mr. Forbes intended to take the Glasgow coach at

Carlisle, arrange matters, or get information in the western capital, and proceed either by post-chaise, stage, or mail, whichever best suited for the rest of the journey.

It was a dreary travel to Scotland in that season; the winter had fairly set in, and every stage let us know that we were getting into his hereditary domains in the north. People accustomed to express trains would have thought our progress slow, but such transits being yet undreamt of, the immense improvement of highways, and increased speed of travelling in late years, compared with the times of their recollection, was the theme of all the elders inside and out. I think the northern mail carried about twelve passengers; we had some variation of company at every stopping-place for breakfast, dinner, or bed—all were duly considered and allowed for in those days. What on earth has become of the large inns in all the towns that lived and flourished by the like?

Mr. Forbes seemed to have no return of the melancholy notions which his daughter dreaded; he took notes of the weather, entered into conversation with the most serious of our

fellow-travellers, told me his experiences in earlier journeys; they were all confirmatory of the astonishing progress of things, for Mr. Forbes had gone to Edinburgh by the stage which left and returned to London within the fortnight, he had been out thirty-one days in a swift sailing packet from London-bridge to the Leith-pier, and he had journeyed from Carlisle to Glasgow in a waggon which stuck three times in the west country ruts, and had to be extricated by its own passengers.

I felt convinced that the shaking up from ledger, desk, and the daily routine of his retired life, would be beneficial to the banker, even if the rumours he deprecated were true, and his four thousand went by the board with the Leith establishment. The gloomy fancies were put off by the variety of scene and company, the contact of new places and people, and all the enlivening effects of travelling in those days.

Yes, it may be an old man's prejudice, but I hold one saw more of the world, of men and of manners, got the dust better shaken off, and more of the fresh winds of life about

one, in a journey of any length, by stage or mail, than one can get now by running from one end of Europe to the other, with the screech of the steam and the thunder of the engine in one's ears, and everything in art or nature whirled away so quickly from one's eyes that there is no time to take note of them. The crowd in the railway stations is greater, the number of passengers in the train a hundredfold those of the abolished coach; but our haste reduces the multitude to one undistinguishable mass; their individualities and belongings utterly lost to the observer; people have no time to see or to talk in those flying trails of smoke and thunder, and life has become too great a scurry for either thought or enjoyment.

To continue my story. There was life on the great northern roads along which we posted, for they were the only channels of trade and travel; there was life in the roadside inns, where every soul looked out for the coming coach, with bright fires glancing through the wintry mist, and full spread tables seen through their shining windows; there was life in those larger houses in the hearts of busy towns, to whose doors we dashed

up with flaring lamps and bugle blast, though splashed with mud from the heavy weather, and glad to rest for the night.

On the highways and in the travellers' rooms, there was news to be heard, and new scenes to be met with ; there were acquaintances to be made for the time, some of them agreeable enough, as most men will be when out of the groove and off the string, and not likely to come in each other's way again. All seemed to cheer up the banker's spirits ; he was himself, indeed—a livelier self than I had ever seen him—by the time we reached Carlisle.

But the weather was wretched ; the November fog and drizzle habitual to London had set in before we left ; as we progressed northward the drizzle became driving showers of mingled rain and sleet, varied with storms of hail, fierce cutting winds, and hours of heavy Scotch mist by way of calm. It would have been a trying journey for any man of his years and state of health, and I noticed that Forbes' cough was on the increase, but he did not complain of it ; the man's spirit was manifestly up ; his Scottish zeal for business in consequence took a keener edge ; and though both tired and weatherworn,

we pushed on from Carlisle without half-an-hour's delay, being just in time for the evening coach to Glasgow.

The west country roads were particularly deep, and the weather was worse, if possible, that night; we did not reach our destination, the "Buck's Head" hotel, a large and respectable house, still to be seen in Argyll-street, Glasgow, and still frequented by the gentility of northern tourists, till daylight had come as it comes to Saint Mungo's city in November.

Its increasing size and commerce were the marvel of that day; they have increased tenfold since, but the mud below and the murky sky above remain the same as when I first saw them some three-and-forty years ago, for Nature does not change, and she has kept there also the same hearty, hospitable people, with their hard-working weeks and stiff Sundays.

Our arrival happened to be on one of the latter; there was no business to be done, of course. Mr. Forbes congratulated himself and me on having reached Glasgow within four days from London, and also on the opportunity of resting for the Sabbath, and being edified by the Presbyterian preaching, which, he averred, was

to be found in its ancient strength and purity in the Glasgow kirks.

I thought a good sound sleep might have served us both as well, but could not venture to dissent from the Scotch banker on such a serious subject ; I therefore stood gallantly to the guns he appointed me, shared his breakfast of dried haddocks and green tea, to keep us both awake and lively ; and when the bells began to ring, and all Glasgow turn out, till the streets looked like a moving mass of dark rich dresses and grave faces, I got the loan of a Scotch psalm-book and Bible—they kept a supply of those things in the “Buck’s Head” then, whatever they do now—made myself as churchlike as possible, and marched away with Mr. Forbes to the Tron Kirk, where he assured me an orthodox sermon might be expected from one of his own early school-fellows, who was then a reverend D.D. of great repute in pulpit and presbytery.

“He will not know me among the congregation,” Forbes observed ; “it is now thirty years since our last meeting, and I have no time to renew old acquaintance ; but he is a man of great gifts for controversy and soundness in doctrine, and the son of a minister under whom

my father sat, and so did I in my early youth. It was in his kirk I first took the sacrament at the November occasion ; he preached in Liberton then, but was afterwards called to a parish near Falkirk, a pastoral farming-place, and out of the world for him ; he was much run after at the time, you see, and never had an empty pew, but since the people were said to be God-fearing and strict in the good old ways of Scotland, Mr. Henderson preferred them to the Liberton people, who were too near the fashion and folly of Edinburgh. I hear he is minister of that parish yet, and preaching every Sabbath, though he must be near fourscore. People go with their difficulties to him from east and west country, for he is a man of singular insight and experience ; and, Lucien, there are times when I could wish to be near him,' and the banker almost groaned.

We got into the Tron Kirk with some difficulty, it was unusually crowded, as my companion informed me. I had seen a Scotch congregation when marched to the grammar-school pew in Baltimore ; this was a larger gathering of the same grave looks and respectable figures.

In a Scotch church there is nothing to be seen but the people.

I was looking round upon them, let me observe, with sincere respect, for nowhere could be seen such a crowd of intelligent faces, when the minister, for whom they waited in reverential silence, made his appearance in the pulpit.

He was an old man, of a tall, spare figure, with something venerable and commanding in his manner and bearing—a Scottish face which was still eminently handsome, for of all types it is the least to be spoiled by years; his hair was snow-white and worn longer than the common, his deep-set eyes were still clear and calmly bright, telling of the experience but not the feebleness of age, and Forbes whispered to me, “It is the old Doctor Alexander Henderson.”

There was a glow of positive delight in the banker’s face as he looked up to the minister of his youth, under whom his father sat, and in whose kirk he received his first sacrament, and nobody could have imagined the strong deep voice which filled the Tron Kirk with the expressive if not elegant verses of the Scotch psalm, belonged to one who was near four-score.

The service proceeded as usual in Scotch

kirks; the banker evidently felt no weariness from his journey through the long prayers and unaccompanied psalmody. Perhaps he was at home in Liberton all the time, young and untroubled with melancholy notions, which had come with his gathering years; but when the text was fairly given out; it was—for I happened to mark it in my book and memory, “Let him that standeth take heed lest he fall;” and the reverend Henderson had duly divided his discourse into six heads, with doctrines and applications—the three days’ posting overcame me, and I dropped to sleep in the corner of the pew, most fortunately out of sight, and convenient for that purpose.

I heard the preacher going on from head to head; it was only a dog’s sleep I had, being haunted with the continual fear of nodding or otherwise giving offence to Forbes; when something like a sudden start, as if the banker had got a blow or a fright, woke me up, and I saw that he was as white as his own handkerchief, and sat there with closed eyes, compressed lips, and hands rigidly clasped together.

“What is the matter?” escaped from me in an involuntary whisper.

"Nothing, oh, nothing; don't disturb the kirk," he murmured through his teeth.

"You are unwell, Mr. Forbes; let me take you to the inn." I was going to rise and take him by the arm, when he laid a sudden powerful grasp on mine, and whispered—

"For the Lord's sake, Lucien, let me alone and take no notice, it will soon be over."

Our movements were so quiet, and the congregation so occupied with the sermon, that only those in our immediate vicinity observed them at all. I saw that the best, as well as the most friendly course, was to let Forbes have his own way; he was a man of great resolution, and whatever had come over him, was determined to attract no attention, or be the cause of disturbance to the listening kirk. He was wiping his face hard by this time with his handkerchief. I followed the direction of all the assembly's eyes, and looked at the minister; he had got into a portion of his sermon which seemed to be of more than common interest, and I soon discovered that the reverend Henderson was making incidental reflections on the case of one of his own parishioners, a respectable farmer, and an elder in the kirk, who had

nevertheless been tried, found guilty, and executed for murder at Falkirk. The case made a great sensation at the time, and is still memorable in the criminal calendar of Scotland.

The man had led an upright and religious life, as far as could be ascertained, up to the commission of his crime, his temptation to which was a large sum of money in the possession of a Highland drover, his casual acquaintance, met at a lonely road-side inn, and suddenly disposed of in a wild unfrequented moor, across which they walked together to Falkirk late on an autumn evening.

My memory still retains the impression made by the old minister's keen, clear, and warning remarks ; his text no doubt intentionally chosen, and though the activity of Satan and the might of electing grace was set forth in the highest and stiffest terms of Scottish Calvinism, there was an insight into the deep places of human nature, a logical summing up of causes for and against both saint and sinner, strange to one who had not thought of the like, and yet with a kernel of hard truth in them, and mighty uses of humbling and admonition. These last are the preacher's own words, and while I listened

as earnestly and attentively as the rest of the congregation, the reverend Henderson's discourse, in spite of Scripture phrases and theological terms, brought Madame Palivez to my mind, and I almost heard her say, "Calvinism is but Christian fatalism, and therefore true."

The minister concluded with an earnest and impressive application of the warning contained in his text. Hard and stern as his peculiar doctrines seemed, he had not spared to enforce charity for the backsliding on his hearers, and it struck me as passing strange that the reverend doctor should express a very satisfactory opinion of the final state of his parishioner, whom a jury had found guilty of a deliberate and cold-blooded murder. It was the temptation of Satan overcoming a child of grace and causing him to sin grievously, but not beyond repentance, for he had given signs of being one of the elect, and none of such could be lost.

I had avoided looking at Forbes after he laid that grasp on my arm, but I took stealthy notes, enough to see that he gradually recovered his composure, and at the close of the sermon appeared calm, grave, and impressed, like the sitters around him.

When the service was over, I saw his eyes follow the old minister as he came down from the pulpit, joined his son and his family as they came out of their accustomed pew, and exchanged greetings with their friends and acquaintances at the kirk-door. But the banker made no attempt to claim his recognition, on the contrary, he kept in the background till all the group were out of sight, and then walked with me in silence to our hotel. There we both retired to rest very early; Forbes had tried to read a good book he brought with him, but either his eyes or his thoughts could not fix upon it; he gave up reading, yet was not inclined to talk, particularly about the indisposition which had come over him in church, and fearing to offend him by taking further notice of it, while feeling completely worn out myself, I took the first opportunity to get quietly off to bed.

It was earlier than anybody else thought of retiring; the few travellers who had not gone to the evening kirk sat reading or talking seriously in the public room. Mr. Forbes sat in his own private parlour, leaning his head on his hand, looking into the fire, and advising

me to get to bed, with a promise that he would not sit late himself.

All the large house was quiet, as became its respectable character, in the Scottish Sabbath evening, and, unwilling to break its silence by ringing a second time for the chambermaid to show me my room, I took my candle and stepped upstairs, where the waiter told me she was doing something in No. 15, and would come in a minute.

The upper flats were, if possible, more still than the lower. I called in a subdued tone, but nobody responded; there was light, however, in an opposite room, the door of which stood ajar; I heard somebody moving about there—a female voice saying, “Yes, sir, I’ll have up your breakfast in good time.” Then a man spoke; I could not hear what he said, but the voice was so like that of Esthers that it almost fixed me to the spot.

The woman replied to his question, it was something about never minding trouble for considerate gentlemen, and she would be sure to let him know. The next moment she stepped out of the room, wished him good-night, and closed the door: it was the chambermaid her-

self, a neat, active, and very steady-looking young Scotchwoman ; I stepped forward instantly, not to be seen listening, asked the way to my room, and was directed forthwith.

It seemed absurd to myself, but I could not have gone to sleep without knowing who was in No. 15. A man is never very dextrous when worn out with travelling and church-going ; I pretended to want half-a-dozen of things, made apologies for giving trouble, looked civil, would have offered silver if I had not been afraid of a misunderstanding, and at last plumped out, "Who is the gentleman in No. 15 ; I think I have seen him before?"

"Maybe you have, sir," said the chambermaid, surprised but not at all disconcerted ; "he is a commercial gentleman from Manchester, and his name is Mr. Taylor."

"Indeed," said I, "then it is probable he is the same." The artifice must have been rather transparent, but the steady chambermaid only hoped I would rest well, bade me good-night, and closed my door also. I could, then sleep in peace ; the manager was gone to Ireland about his business in Dublin by that

time; Mr. Taylor in No. 15 was a considerate gentleman, perhaps an old frequenter of the house; his voice sounded very like Esthers', but there were accidental resemblances in tones as well as faces; and he had come from Manchester, doubtless in the cotton line.

One should not have been so drowsy after sleeping in church, but the poppies seemed to grow about my head that night. I had forgotten to bid them call me in the morning, forgotten to arrange anything of the kind with Forbes, and felt somewhat ashamed when I got downstairs in the morning to find that it was late breakfast time, that all Glasgow was at its business, and he had gone out about his.

"He did not say where he was going, sir," said the waiter; "he is gone nearly two hours, a very energetic gentleman, sir; he sat here reading till near twelve last night, and was up before any of them this morning."

That waiter was from Ireland, and in the habit of making similar remarks to all encouraging listeners. His information made me anxious about the banker; his sudden indisposition in

church, the little rest he allowed himself after so much fatigue, and his worn, troubled look overnight, were bad signs, and brought poor Helen's fears of mental unsoundness forcibly to my recollection.

While I was thinking the subject over, Forbes himself came back; the worn look was still in his face, but he was composed as usual, answering my apologies for late sleeping with "You were quite right, lad; you had a long cold journey with me, and there is nothing like a sound sleep for a young heart and good conscience. I remember the time when I could sleep long and soundly too, Lucien, before the cares and the sins of the world came on me, making my head grey and my heart black." Were the melancholy notions taking hold of him, or had he heard bad news of the bank business?

"You have been at the Leith house, sir?" said I, intent on making that out.

"Yes," he said quietly.

"And found things satisfactory, I hope?"

"No, Lucien, anything but that. Of course they did not say so, we bank folk flourish to the last, but I have reason to believe that the

London reports are true, and the house can't stand long."

"You will take immediate measures to have your account settled then?" said I.

"No, Lucien, I won't; I'll never push people over the pit's edge as long as they can keep their footing on it. I know something about being pushed myself. Lucien, never push anybody for money if you can help it; many a man would have escaped ruin, ay, and dark, deadly sin, lad, if he had got time and sparance."

"But it is a large sum to lose."

"Ay, four thousand pounds," he said, wringing his hands, with a look of desperate misery sufficient for the losing of his last penny; "it is hard to lose, and has been worse to gain; but let it go, let it go. I'll never push a tottering house, and you'll not spread reports against it; it is those panic rumours that bring banks down."

"I never intermeddle in other people's business, sir."

"I know it, lad; but we will go to Edinburgh. I have taken our places in the mail; it starts at one, and will get in by six, if we

haven't a snow-storm, which some think is coming. At any rate, we will go as far as Falkirk, not into the town," and he spoke with a sort of shudder, as if there were something fearful to be met with or expected there; "but stop at the 'Barley Sheaf,' an old-fashioned respectable inn on the roadside. It has stood there these hundred years and more, kept by the same family, an offset of the Drummonds of Hawthornden, and properly proud of their descent. The house was once a tower, but they have altered it; all the farm about it is their own, and I can tell you the Drummonds keep good order and sober hours, at least they did when I last travelled that way; so if the snow comes heavy we will stop there for the night; but I am forgetting to ask if you have no objections," added the kindly banker.

"None at all, sir; I am entirely at your convenience, and will be ready to start by the mail at one."

"That's right, lad; come along then, and we'll see something of Glasgow. There is a cathedral and a university worth looking at,

not to speak of the Broomielaw and the shipping ; it is a wonderful town for growth and gathering, but nothing to Edinburgh, where I was born."

CHAPTER XIII.

THE SIN DISCOVERED.

WE saw Glasgow to as much advantage as it could be seen by the dim and lurid light of a storm-laden sky, with occasional gusts of sleet, which kept increasing in volume and frequency till the time of starting. Mr. Forbes knew the town well, from many a commercial visit. He showed me most of its wonders, new and old; seemed interested and amused himself in spite of the impending loss, over which, nevertheless, he groaned sometimes, at least I thought so. It was a kind of short, suppressed moan that escaped him involuntarily in the midst of our walk and converse.

Of course I did not appear to notice it; but more than once I made endeavours to persuade him that he ought to look more keenly after the

accounts regarding which he had taken so long a journey; and the concern it seemed to give him, combined with his resolution not to push, was more than I could account for.

“Was the man’s mind really sound or not?” was the question that recurred to me, as duly at one o’clock we took our places in the Edinburgh mail, amid the customary haste and bustle in front of the Glasgow Post Office.

The coach held six inside, and nobody appeared to venture on the top; the bitter wind, sleet and snow, which had now commenced in good earnest would have been considerations to face. Everybody was predicting a shocking bad afternoon; but among the four passengers who made up our complement, I recognised the old minister, Doctor Henderson, whose sermon I had half slept through, and yet could not forget. How upright and actively the man of four score moved about!

How well known and much respected he seemed in that scene of tumult! A posse of friends had escorted him to the coach, and he was specially accompanied by what the Scotch would call a *douce* man of middle age, grave, well dressed, and apparently well to do, probably

a Glasgow merchant of good credit, and a ruling elder in some Presbyterian kirk. I never saw the man before or after, and remember him only on account of the conversation in the Edinburgh mail.

It had commenced between him and the old minister before they took their seats, and was resumed as we rattled out of Glasgow. I happened to sit next to the reverend doctor; Forbes was opposite me, and two Falkirk men, who might have been farmers, occupied the remaining space. When our ears had got accustomed to the roll of the coach, every word was audible, and I discovered that the question between the minister and his friend concerned the case which, in Scotch parlance, the former had improved in his sermon on the previous day.

The merchant evidently dissented from the reverend doctor's views on the evidences of the executed man's election—at least, so it appeared to me; and I listened with considerable curiosity to the high and hard divinity which both sides brought to bear on the subject.

With that skill in dogmatic theology which seems peculiar to the Scotch layman, the merchant laid down the eternal law against the con-

victed sinner; and with weapons tempered in the same scholastic forge, but with no arrogation of superior authority, the minister replied to his propositions, and refuted his arguments. A theological controversy, particularly when bearing on a subject of such public interest, would be sure of listeners anywhere in the North.

Every ear and every eye was soon rivetted on the speakers except that of Forbes, who leant down in his corner, and entirely covered his face with his hands. Being nearest the minister I caught his words most distinctly, and as he argued for the undoubted predestination of M'Ewen—that was the unfortunate man's name—as far as signs of grace might be discerned by human judgment, I ventured into the controversy with—

“You are then of opinion, sir, that if a person be one of the elect, his doings, good or bad, are of no consequence?”

“By their fruits ye shall know them, young man,” said the minister gravely, but kindly. “I hold in common with the soundest divines of our Presbyterian Confession, that human works are of no avail to salvation, but only evidences of faith; that a child of God may commit sin

through the corruption of his nature and the temptations of the enemy."

"May he commit murder, sir?"—I did not mean to be clever, but merely to get the full extent of his doctrine.

"David did, young man, commit murder, and more; yet he was a child of grace, and a man after God's own heart."

Forbes had been sitting with a bowed-down, covered face, as if asleep or lost in his own musings, but now he looked up at the old doctor with such an earnest, hopeful glance, and said—"David was forgiven and restored, and why not Andrew M'Ewen or any other sinner of like sort."

"Andrew M'Ewen or any other sinner in whom the grace of repentance is evident," said the minister, with calm severity, and I thought he looked Forbes in the face—"but those great and heinous sins which set a flagrant example to the world, give a triumph to the enemy, and cast discredit on the Church, are ordinarily punished in some signal way, either by law or Providence, on this side of time, and no man may think himself out of danger in eternity without making public confession and giving public satisfaction for the same."

Forbes made no reply. His head had dropped on his hands before the minister's speech was done, and all the rest of the time he sat still and close in his corner, taking no opportunity to introduce himself to the reverend doctor whom he had heard in his youth, and still esteemed so highly, nor the slightest part in the conversation, which gradually became less controversial and more general, for though a grave, we were a social company.

Our talk was very often interrupted by the accidents of the way, for it was a very tempestuous journey. A fierce north-east wind blew right in our teeth, driving before it moving masses of snow, which soon covered high road and field with huge white drifts, obliterating the way-marks, and making our progress grievously slow. The wheels of our vehicle stuck fast in hidden ruts; the horses plunged and struggled through the snow with the loss of shoes and the breaking of traces; there was no help to be had but at the stages, which seemed to lengthen as we got out among the moorland farms and pastures that stretch away east of Glasgow.

There were few travellers abroad. The driver said nobody would come out in such weather

who could help it; but we observed a post-chaise, which seemed to be keeping us in sight all the way, though at a considerable distance, and concluded it was to make sure of its own track on the high road; the superior abilities of the mail-coach horses and men being generally admitted in the case of snow-storms, with which my Scotch companions seemed to my southern ears singularly familiar, though they allowed that such a fall did not come often.

At length the driver intimated his intention of putting up at Falkirk for the night, as he believed that neither horse nor man could get through the east country road.

"Tell him to put us down at the 'Barley Sheaf,' then Lucien. I would rather rest there than in the town, for my head is like to rend," said Forbes.

I said something about his over-working himself, but he made no answer. I gave his commands, and in a few minutes more, when labouring through a heavy drift, we were all glad to see the spires and chimneys of Falkirk, rising as the old town does from the midst of level moorlands, and seen dark and massive against the wintry sky.

Some minutes more and the "Barley Sheaf" became visible. It was a solitary house on the road-side, without hut or hall in sight of it, and about half a mile from the town. It might have stood there from the Pictish times ; there was such a look of old and weather-beaten strength about its thick walls and heavy slate roof, I could well believe it had been an ancient tower, the house and hold of an impoverished branch of the noble Drummonds, for though by no means a large house, it was composed of a centre and two wings, the former rising to three low stories, from the high narrow windows of which cross-bow or arquebuss might have been discharged with advantage in times of feud and foray.

That was the original tower, while the wings on either side were manifestly modern additions, built when more room was wanted, and the offset of the Drummonds condescended to keep an inn. Its sign waved and creaked in the gusty wind. Two great oaks which sheltered it in the rear gave out deeper groans and swayed their long branches, now swathed in sheets of snow. A young man was opening a passage through the drift to its door, when the Edin-

burgh mail drew up, and we scrambled out with a friendly good-evening to our fellow-passengers, and no small satisfaction to see the firelight shining from within. They did not seem to expect travellers; but a very respectable woman in widow's weeds came to the door and welcomed Mr. Forbes in broad Scotch, as an old and valued customer, assuring him he was welcome, but she was sorry he would find the house so thronged. It was the market night of Falkirk, and so many farmers were storm-stayed with her she didn't know where to put them.

"Never mind, Mrs. Drummond," said the banker, "I am glad to find myself in your house and glad to see you well. My young friend and I travelled together, and you will put us up as well as you can. People ought to be thankful for any shelter on such a night."

Mrs. Drummond concurred in the pious sentiment, said the weather was ordinary, and she and her daughter, a sober-looking maiden, with high cheek-bones, sensible discourse, and a black gown, assisted in the getting off of our overcoats and wrappers in the narrow passage, and conducted us into the parlour, which served

as travellers' and common sitting-room on the one side, while their private domain, the kitchen, lay on the other. The parlour was low-ceiled, long, and wainscoted. There was neither cushioned chair nor sofa among its furniture; but the grate was heaped high with the best Scotch coal, all in one red glow. The mantel-piece was ornamented with the dark portraits of two or three ancient divines, all in Geneva gowns; I know John Knox was one of them. There was a long table in the centre, well covered for supper, and around sat the storm-stayed farmers, some dozen strong, damp and splashed from the bad weather, and doubtless in a state of hungry expectation, but all in good humour, and looking very respectable of their class. Forbes knew some of them from former calls at the house, and their greetings were kind and friendly.

To all inquiries after his health he made the customary reply, "Quite well," but when fairly in the light of fire and candle, for the short dim day had reached its close, though the old eight-day clock in the corner pointed to four, I was shocked at the change in his appearance made by that bitter journey. The man had over-taxed himself, and was ill

indeed. He tried hard to hold up; got a drink of the landlady's own ale, which, it seemed, was a notable specific, and said it was only a headache he had got. But when the substantial supper was served, Forbes did it no justice.

He excused himself from saying grace, to the evident surprise of the landlady. By-the-bye, she presided, while her son and daughter did waiters' duty. There were no other servants that I could see on the establishment; and while the farmers yet sat at table, growing lively and loquacious over their hot whisky-punch, Forbes requested Mrs. Drummond to show him his room, for nothing but a sleep would do him any good.

"I hope the young gentleman and you won't object to occupy one room, sir?" said the landlady. She could speak very good English when it was necessary to be so genteel. "I have but one to give you, and should not have that either, but three of the farmers are my own acquaintances, and will sleep in the parlour. There are two good beds in it. You'll remember the room; it's the best one in the tower, as we call it yet.

You may hear the wind roaring there, but it won't shake the floor or walls. I have lit a good fire, because the night is cold; and if you want anything, just blow the silver call you'll find on the mantelpiece. It belonged to my grandfather," she said, casting an explanatory glance at me, "and suits this old house better than a bell."

Forbes said he knew the room. It was as comfortable a sleeping-place as man could wish. He knew his friend would have no objections to share it with him. I hastened to confirm the fact, mentally remarking that the banker seemed glad of somebody in his room, and, early as it was, volunteered to retire with him, for the odour of whisky and the talk of turnips and black cattle were becoming powerful in the parlour.

"If you please, sir," said Mrs. Drummond, laying her hard-working hand on my shoulder—"you'll excuse me, but nobody, except in case of sickness, goes to bed in this house before the family exercise. Mr. Forbes has often conducted the worship for me. I had hoped he would have done so to-night; but since he is unwell, my mother's cousin, Elder

Macpherson, will officiate, no doubt, to our general edification."

To be commanded to sit up for family prayer in a roadside inn was new to my southern experience, but my senior traveller appeared to think it a perfectly proper and untransgressable arrangement, saying he had the pleasure of hearing Elder Macpherson conduct the exercises some years ago, and he had no doubt the opportunity would be profitable to his young friend.

The landlady took charge of him; he bade me a kindly good-night, said he should be better in the morning, and I sat down beside the redoubted elder as he afterwards proved, was hospitably pressed to share his punch, and made acquainted with his recollections of hard winters and great snow-falls till the clock struck eight, when the table was cleared, the large Bible and Psalm-book brought in, and the exercise proceeded exactly as I had seen it at Notting Hill House. We had the same reverent reading of a chapter in the Bible, a psalm of the Scotch version sung to an old monotonous tune, and a long extemporary prayer, interspersed with re-

flections on every event of public or local interest, including the McEwen case, and the uses of warning and watchfulness to be drawn therefrom.

When we rose from our knees, Mrs. Drummond looked at me, the stranger, to see if a suitable impression had been made on my southern mind, and I hope the good woman was satisfied, for she showed me carefully up the narrow stone stair, which went winding like a corkscrew to the second floor.

"It was built with the old tower, sir, the middle part of this house, about the time of Flodden Field; it was a small place, only two rooms on every floor; you are going to the best of them; step in, sir," said Mrs. Drummond.

And by a narrow door at the angle of the stair, I entered a low but comfortably-sized chamber, wainscoted and uncarpeted, except a small piece of what our grandmothers called Turkey in front of the fire; two windows, each in a corner, and hung with blue stamped linen, two old-fashioned beds, with curtains of the same, set against the wall, right opposite each other, with the fire blazing

between them, lighting up a long low dressing-table, a very small dressing-glass, a shaving apparatus fully displayed, and a gilt-edged Bible bound in dark morocco.

It was a primitive, antiquated, but not comfortless chamber; every detail is indelibly impressed on my memory from what happened there. I dream of it sometimes yet, when the winter nights are long and stormy, though the Drummonds are gone from their ancient hold this many a year, and the "Barley Sheaf" has been swept out of sight and mind by the North British Railway.

Forbes was fast asleep; he lay with his face to the wall, so that I could not see it, but his breathing was deep and regular, and I took care not to disturb the worn-out man. No one else could have slept so soundly in such a night; the wind seemed to have become a hurricane, and was roaring in the chimney and in the old oaks outside; but, as the landlady said, it shook neither floor nor walls; they had been put together in the days of strong building; the snow which drove against the windows was agreeably contrasted with the bright blazing

fire ; I heaped it still higher from a wooden box, or rather chest of coals conveniently set in the nearest corner, and went to bed sincerely thankful for the cheer and shelter of that lonely inn.

It was some time before I fell asleep ; the roar of the wind and the flare of the fire kept me awake, though all the house was quiet, and my thoughts went back to Madame Palivez, how it fared with her since I left London, on what business she had sent Esthers to Ireland, and what was the subject of that silent converse between him and Hannah Clark. It might have been those musings that when sleep at last stole on me brought a sudden dream of the bank in Old Broad-street.

I thought I was sitting there in Esthers' office, and Madame came in, looking well and cheerful, but dressed as if for a journey. I saw Esthers and Hannah Clark, also in travelling trim, at the open door, and she told me they were going with her, but I must remain and look after the business. It vexed me sorely in my dream to think that they should be taken and I left behind ; but Madame talked kindly and persuasively, showing good reasons, which I could not remember afterwards, for the arrangement.

Then we shook hands and parted in great friendship ; she gave me special charges regarding a large account between her and Mr. Forbes, which I had never heard of before, but was to get settled as soon as possible, for Madame thought it had been lying too long. At the door she looked back, smiled on me, and went away into her own private room, where something had to be done before she set out.

I began to search for Mr. Forbes' account, and was turning over piles of books and papers, when I heard Madame call me from the far back rooms, first in a lower, then in a louder tone, and at last in a cry which made me start up broad awake.

It must have been the dead of night, for the fire was burned down to a heap of glowing embers. The storm without was fearful ; but there was somebody talking in the room !

I raised myself and looked about, there on the opposite bed was Mr. Forbes sitting upright ; the light which rose from the embers in fitful and sulphurous flashes played on his white ghastly face, but his eyes were fast shut, his hands were in strange convulsive motion, and he was speaking in a low but distinct tone. " Killed, dead

already, and only got three blows ; and all the money is mine—four thousand pounds in gold ; that will pay off old Reubens, and settle the Forbes' in Edinburgh ; my own relations trying to bring me to ruin, and all for not marrying old Willy's daughter. But the bank is safe now, and so am I ; it can never come out ; nobody knows he came here—oh ! what made him come ? but I am safe from the Gazette—from the gallows ; Reubens will never know who forged his signature, I'll take up the bill to-morrow. But murder comes out as well as forgery ; what shall I do with the body ? down under the boards here ?—ha, it's not deep enough ! if I could get it covered with clay ;” and he pushed and strained with his hands, as if putting something into a narrow space.

“No, no, I can't get it covered, and that sweet angel face, all pale and bloody, will be turning up to me for twenty years ; they'll come to dig here for new foundations when the old house is taken down, and find a skeleton. The beautiful boy will be only bones then ; it will be in *Saunders* ; the Dublin people will talk and wonder about it ; maybe they will mind that my office was here, but they can prove nothing. If

I could get this horse-pistol in—the blood and hair will never come off the stock. What do you want, Melrose Morton, showing me that bag? What if La Touche's name is in the inside of it, and the boy can't be found? I know nothing about him or his money. I never saw them; I don't know how that bag got under the shelf in my office. What if I did pay old Reubens in gold? it's none of your business. You'll go to America? well, I am glad of it, but people can come back. You would not bring your own cousin to the gallows, I know that; but keep away, Melrose, keep away; the story will die out, every nine day's wonder does. But oh, his father and mother! they will go to ruin, they'll break their hearts, and he'll be coming to me night and day; they don't rest, these murdered people, that we put under floors and offices—he'll come wherever I go; there is no keeping them out;" here there was a distinct but muffled sound which seemed to come from behind his bed.

"What's that?" he cried, waking up at once, and his eyes opened on me where I sat opposite him, fixed as very stone, and my face, seen by that lurid flickering light must have told him that all was known to me.

CHAPTER XIV.

THE CONFESSION.

WE sat and looked at each other for a minute, while the tempest raged without, and the flashing embers went down; then he slowly crept under the bed-clothes as if to hide himself, and turned his face to the wall. I remember getting up with a mortal dread of being left in utter darkness, getting my own candle lit, and heaping coals on the fire. Then I sat down and tried to collect my thoughts, for they were stunned and scattered by the sudden clearing up of that long-kept mystery.

My lost brother's fate was revealed at last—his blood, the ruin of our family, my father's broken heart, my mother's shattered brain, the shadow that had lain so heavily on my

own life, pressing childhood and youth out of it, all were to be required at the hands of the Scotch banker—the upright, pious, benevolent man, whom we and the world had reckoned our best friend. Every word he had uttered in that retracing of his deadly and long-hidden sin through the dreams that must have gone back to it so many a year, seemed burned into my memory. I knew he had done the deed, the how and the why he did it, and for one instant a strong and terrible inclination to take direct and immediate vengeance came over me. I could never account for why it passed away at the sound of his voice, but it did, and the man spoke hoarse and hollow, still keeping his face to the wall.

“Lucien, was I talking in my sleep?”

“You were ;” I could give no longer answer.

“And do you know it all?”

“I do.”

“God’s will be done !” he said, with a heavy groan, “for it was His special Providence that brought you to share my room this night, and I, because of my evil conscience, was glad of a

companion, not knowing that I spoke in my sleep of that which is always present with me by night and day. And now, Lucien, I submit myself to your justice or mercy, whichever you think good to mete out to me. If you accuse me to the law, I will confess my crime and suffer the penalty, no man ever deserved it better; and yet, bethink you, I have suffered a thousand executions all these miserable years from a burdened conscience and the wrath of God; oh, Lucien, they have pursued me in poverty and in wealth, in sleeping and waking, and but for the sake of my innocent child, I would have given myself up to justice long ago; will you bring her to shame and sorrow now?"

I did not answer him; the sudden blaze of wrath over all our ruin past had sunk into its ashes, and wiser, better thoughts came as the unhappy man spoke. The deed was done nearly nineteen years ago, the ruin it had wrought could not be recalled or renovated by a public trial and execution.

The sinner had suffered for his sin, I knew that in the very depths of my consciousness, and his innocent daughter, the gentle, pious, kindly Helen, the woman who loved me with an un-

sought yet pure and delicate affection, she, too, must be involved in the disgrace and punishment of her father.

It may be but an imagination, or that the barrier which divided my life from that other unknown one was worn away and half broken at this part, for in looking back it seems to me that my long dead and buried brother, "the beautiful boy who was only bones now," was somehow present.

His young saint-like face, so fair and yet so noble, kindly, generous, peacemaking ways, all rushed back upon my memory, pleading for Forbes and for Helen, and I felt that his spirit could rest without revenge. I collected my thoughts, and spoke as best I could.

"Your life and your character are safe from me; God will judge between us, and if you have sincerely repented, as I believe you have, no doubt He will forgive; it was a fearful sin, and fearfully did my family suffer by it, but the past is passed, and no mortal will ever hear from me a syllable of the fact; but tell me, if you can, did my brother Raymond come to your office, or did you send for him?"

"He came, Lucien, he came; the poor boy

wanted to ask a question about old Reubens' claim on his father ; that Jew was my heaviest creditor, too. Raymond came through Greek alley from Castle-street, that his why he was last seen there. My office was at the back of the old house. I was alone in it, at the fall of the winter day, and on the brink of ruin. Nobody knew it, but nothing else could have saved me ; oh, that I had not been saved ! But, Lucien, there is a devil, let infidels say what they will," and the miserable man cowered down in his bed ; "it was he that said—not with an audible voice, but in the ear of my soul, when poor Raymond shook his bag, told me he had got four thousand pounds in good gold there, and that would float the Armagh bank over the hard times, the evil spirit said to me—' You are going to ruin, and have forged a bill ;' I had done that the week before, for I could not submit to be a bankrupt, and give the Edinburgh house a triumph over me and my marriage. Next he said, 'There is a horse-pistol in the corner, kept to frighten thieves, though it's old, and can't be loaded ; strike with the heavy stock of it, and the four thousand in gold will be your own.' Lucien, I followed that counsel, the same that

brought our first father to eat of the forbidden tree ; my fall was also permitted by eternal wisdom, and I struck three, but I think the first blow killed him. I suppose the tempter left me then, and a horrible remorse, like that of Judas, came on me, but I could not die like him ; maybe it was grace that prevented me, for I think I had the effectual calling in my youth, under Doctor Henderson's ministry, before the temptations of the world and the cares of married life beset me. I buried him there, by the last light of the winter day, in the damp earth under the flooring ; it was terrible work tearing up the boards and getting the body in, and I thought I had buried everything with him, but I forgot the bag, though I took the money out of it.

“ Melrose Morton found it next week in a corner of the office ; he was my clerk then, and when the report rose about the boy being missed, when his father came to our house inquiring for him, he put one thing with another, made out what I had done, and told me so, like a brave, honest man, but also said he would never bring his own cousin to the gallows, and sailed with his old mother for America by the next packet. Oh ! Lucien,”

the man seemed talking to relieve his memory, "nothing has gone well with me since then, and nothing should. I took up the forged bill, paid old Reubens and the Forbes' of Edinburgh; nobody suspected me—nobody traced the boy to my office; I locked it up the next week for being damp, and took to another room of the old house, the hard times passed, my bank floated, and I got well established, but there was your father's ruin and last sickness, there was your mother's loss of reason. Lucien, I think she did see the boy that night in autumn; and my wife, she was a discreet, God-fearing woman, too good for me, if I had been twice a Forbes, though they did worse than cast me off for marrying her, lending on high interest, and always speering and waiting for my downcome. She guessed, I know not how it was revealed to her, but she did guess, and the thought struck her to the heart.

"Maybe I was not the same she had known me; great and grievous sins make a man different to his nearest; yet I loved her to the last; but the Lord made it part of my punishment that she should pine into a decline with that fearful guess, and die, warning me to

repent with her last breath—she never spoke of it till then.

“In the same winter my two boys were taken from me by a sudden visitation of the scarlet fever, and ever since I have been a miserable, restless, gathering sinner, heaping up wealth that brought no blessing with it, trying to make amends to the family I had wronged so sorely, and hiding my deadly secret for the sake of my daughter and the honourable family I had come of. Lucien, you have listened to me so far ; let me tell you one thing more, and think of it as you may. You were the boy’s last and only brother, and I had a notion that it might make matters up in this world, if I left all my gatherings between you and Helen ; she is innocent of all knowledge, all guess at the crime ; she was a lisping child when it was committed ; she is good as ever a daughter of fallen Adam was or can be, and it was my hope that you nor no mortal man might know her father to be a murderer—ay, Lucien, that is the right word—that she might look on you, and you on her, with an honest unchecked affection, and be happy together when I and my sin were gone.”

He ceased ; and the fire I had heaped so high

sent up a broad, bright column, like the flame of some new-lit hearth by which no sin or sorrow had been spoken. I felt that there were such happy hearths, which goodwomen's presence and children's play made fair and homely, but I was bound on that deadly service to Madame Palivez.

"I shall never be happy with anyone"—it was spoken in sullen sadness—"my family were unfortunate, and so am I. Your daughter would be too good for a better man."

"But you don't care for her," interrupted Forbes; "you are taken up with the Greek lady and you couldn't think of marrying the daughter of a man whose hands were stained with your brother's blood. You are right, lad, you are right; the whole world would say so. Yet my girl, my Helen, is as innocent as the child unborn. I have willed all I am worth, house and land, bank-stock and business, equally to her and you. I know you will do her justice, Lucien, and don't break the lassie's heart by letting her know of her father's sin."

"I want no share of your property, Mr. Forbes, and as I have already promised, none living, much less your daughter, shall ever hear what has passed between us this night."

“Keep that promise, lad ; keep it if you can ; thereby you will obtain the blessing of the merciful, who shall obtain mercy. You’ll want that some day as well as I ; we are all children of wrath, though my sin is most like scarlet. What is that?” he cried, starting up, as the muffled sound again came from behind the bed. “I have heard that noise a dozen times through the night ; it is like some one moving underground.”

With a vague superstitious terror creeping over me, I caught up my own candle, looked about and under the bed ; there was nothing there, and no room for anything between it and the wall, which the linen curtains covered.

“I know there is nothing to be seen,” said Forbes ; “that noise was not earthly ; it is not the boy, for he is with the blessed ; though once I thought I saw him come into your room with a flash of lightning, maybe it was in conscience’s looking-glass. But the soundest divines have held that evil spirits get power to molest heinous sinners. I know they have been at work about me many a time. Your aunt, Miss Livey, guessed some-

thing of that ; she is dead and gone, and I am going, and what is to become of my poor soul ?”

“ You’ll have time enough to think of that,” said I, not knowing what better to say.

“ The longest time would be too little, Lucien, and mine is growing short. It is my belief I shall never leave this inn. I thought so when we first saw it through the nightfall and the snow, and God’s will be done, if I can get peace and pardon. You have given me both, as far as man could. I know it was sincerely done, lad, though you look so sad and sober ; and no wonder, after such a tale.”

He was looking me in the face now, calmly and kindly, as he used to look when I sat at his table, beside Helen, and suspected nothing ; and the memory of that long, close friendship drew us together, in spite of the horrible secret it had grown over.

‘ He had been tempted, and sinned against me and mine. I, too, was entangled in other meshes. And the woman who led me into them, how wisely had she spoken of his case, without knowing it, except by a sort of divination, which I think she had from nature ; how

wisely of her own also, and how near they came in thought, to seem so far divided ! His enemy of souls was but her relentless fate, and we were all its unlucky subjects. I suppose my look told him something of my thoughts, for he held out his hand, and said, " Lucien, give me yours, and make me sure that you forgive me, and will shield my child from the sorrow and the shame of my ill doing. Say that you are friends with me, for all that's come and gone."

" I am, Mr. Forbes, and I'll stand by Helen, if she ever wants my help, in spite of the world."

I clasped his thin hand as I spoke ; the dark stain on it had been washed out by suffering, and I knew that Raymond would have done so ; his fair face seemed to smile upon me from far-off childhood, as if all the intervening years had been but a troubled dream.

Forbes said nothing, but the large tears rolled down his wan face till he withdrew his hand and dashed them away. We were both silent for a minute or two, the storm without had fallen away to long moaning gusts, which sighed over the moorlands and made the old trees groan.

" It is a dreary night," said the banker, at

last. "Through many a one of the kind have I wished for morning; but my days and nights are drawing to an end; yes, Lucien, I am going, and it were better so, if I could go in peace; I can and should think of nothing else now. We'll speak as we did in former times, before all this was known to you. I can't go without saying farewell to Helen, yet I would not bring her here to alarm the lass, except there were real danger, and then you'll bring her to me; I thought you would when I found myself getting worse in Glasgow, and wrote this slip."

He pulled a pocket-book I had often seen with him from under his pillow. There were notes and letters there. The Scotch banker was cautious and careful to the last.

"You'll take charge of it," he said, handing me a slip of paper, which only contained the words, in his own strongly-marked handwriting,

" ' Dear Helen, accompany the bearer at once, and come to your loving father.

“ ‘ ARCHIBALD FORBES.’

"You'll go for her when the doctor says there is danger? I'll send for a doctor as soon as the

morning comes. We are bound to take all lawful means, but chief of all I wish to see that sound and godly Doctor Henderson. It is an orthodox and noble doctrine that which he maintained so well in his sermon last Sabbath, that the elect can never fall from grace. I think I had evidence of election once, but his insisting on public confession and satisfaction troubles me on account of my daughter and my honourable family."

I tried to persuade him to compose himself and get some rest, promising to summon the doctors, temporal and spiritual, to his aid, as soon as the daylight and the snow permitted. But the man's mind, strong and enduring as it was by nature, seemed unhinged by its inward strife; the terrors of the world to come had taken possession of him, and his thoughts wandered restlessly through the whole Westminster Confession, clutching now at one, now at another hold of Calvinistic hope or consolation.

For myself, I was fairly worn out; the solution of my life's problem had come so late and so strangely, my own prospects were so hopelessly involved in a service nearly as dark, that the past and the present were equally indifferent

to me—my whole world looked black and hopeless ; and with that last and dreariest consolation of philosophy, that things would be all the same in a hundred years hence, I threw myself on my bed and fell fast asleep.

The last I saw of Forbes, he had turned his face to the wall, and was repeating a psalm to himself, but a noise in the room woke me up when the dim daylight was creeping through our linen-curtained windows, and there he was, putting on his clothes, but white as the sheets, and trembling in every limb.

“ You don’t look well,” I said—“ why do you rise so early ?”

“ Oh, I must go by the Belfast coach, and give La Touche the four thousand. It will keep him from looking for his son.”

I saw that partial delirium had come on the the overwrought brain, and with great difficulty persuaded him to go back to bed, while I dressed myself, and went downstairs, for the active household were already up and at work. My first step was to take Mrs. Drummond into confidence. She knew Forbes as a frequent and much-respected guest, and when I told her that his health had been impaired by over-attention

to business, that he had mighty concerns on his mind—bank ones, I took care to indicate—that he had gone beyond his strength in the journey and bad weather, and was now feverish and talking strangely, the good woman at once assured me that she expected nothing else from the gentleman's appearance. He didn't look like himself at all. Elder Macpherson had remarked that there seemed to be some providential crook in his lot, but trying dispensations were sent at times to the best of men.

I wanted to go directly to Falkirk for a doctor, and had taken down my great-coat from its peg in the passage, and put the slip of paper for Helen carefully in its breast-pocket that it might be ready against the medical report, which would probably send me southward, for the impression had grown on me that Forbes' time would not be long; but Mrs. Drummond would not hear of my venturing out in the snow. She said the drift was deep enough to bury houses in the hollows; that I was a southerner, and not acquainted with the road. She would not risk the credit of her house by letting any stranger go out in such a morning.

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Her son Tom would go when the day got clearer ; he knew every step of the way, and was accustomed to snow-drifts ; in the meantime she would look after Mr. Forbes herself. It was her duty, and Providence had pleased to make her well acquainted with sickness and trouble. I had to resign.

The out-door prospect was indeed perilous to unaccustomed eyes. Though the wind had gradually lulled, all round the house was one wide waste of snow piled high enough to cover the lower windows, and leaving no trace of road or fence as far as one could see. It was my first acquaintance with Scotch snow-storms, and I believe was chronicled as one of unusual severity among east country travellers and sheep-farmers.

Mrs. Drummond was as good as her word ; she did everything in her power for the poor banker. He continued feverish and half delirious for the rest of the day. Elder Macpherson prayed and read the Bible with him. They all agreed that his spirit was troubled on account of sin ; but those pious people considered that a most promising sign of one's spiritual condition, and I hinted to them that in his excited state he

talked wildly and charged himself with things he had not done.

Perhaps that precaution was unnecessary. Forbes could and did keep his own secret ; but nobody could leave the house to find the doctor or minister for him till late in the afternoon, when the snow was pronounced to be getting hard, for a stiff frost had set in, and the widow's son ventured out, accompanied by two of the storm-stayed farmers, with poles and shovels.

They brought back a Falkirk doctor of great repute. It was probably his professional cue to make light of cases in general. He certainly did so of the banker's, assuring us there was no danger ; that all he wanted was rest, quiet, and a draught, which he would send him, if his boy could get through the snow that evening. The boy couldn't get through, and Forbes passed another restless, feverish night ; but spiritual concerns entirely occupied his mind. Having once made confession of his deed to me, he never again referred to it, except in his delirious moments, when he talked the matter over with Melrose Morton, and sometimes with my poor, lost brother himself, always insisting that he was not guilty of the fact.

Next day he was quiet. The draught did not come till late in the evening, and was to work wonders ; but it did not. A low fever had evidently set in, which partly affected the man's brain, because it had been overstrained and weakened, and intervals of wandering and quiet succeeded each other.

On the third day the doctor ceased to make light of it, and he told me, as the nearest friend of the sick traveller, that his strength was too far exhausted, and if he had any worldly affairs to settle, it had better be done. It was late in the afternoon when he pleased to tell me.

The frost had continued and increased, the road had been cleared sufficiently for the mails to commence running ; the old minister, who lived two miles out in the country, had sent word that he would come, if Providence and the weather permitted, to see his early parishioner on the following day ; and with an anxious feeling that there was no time to lose, I wanted to set forth southward for Helen.

To attempt travelling by mail or stage-coach would have been a tedious business. There was not a post-chaise kept at the "Barley Sheaf," but the establishment had, for special uses, a

a light strong gig, and a horse shod for the frost, in which, after consultation with Mrs. Drummond and her son, I determined to proceed as far as the English border, where, by all accounts, the roads were clearer and the snow less. There was a splendid moonlight night coming on. Tom, the widow's son, offered to go with me as far as Glasgow by way of guide, for the west country route was preferred as most practicable, and though everybody tried to persuade me that there was no occasion for such haste, an impulse which I could not define then, nor account for since, urged me to take the road. Forbes had been low and quiet all that day. When fairly equipped for the journey, I went up to bid him good-bye, but he was sleeping so soundly that my entrance did not awake him. I paused for a moment beside the bed; the worn face still so strongly marked and manly, the black abundant hair turning so fast to grey, told much sorrow and suffering, but nothing of sin. No man could have believed the tale who had not heard it from his own lips. He was breathing freely, and was not in immediate danger; yet as I stood there it seemed to me that Forbes' troubles were all over, and his

wretched secret was left with myself. I was turning away, not to break up that sound and grateful sleep, when he opened his eyes, looked up and said,

“You are going to bring Helen to me; the doctor thinks I am in danger, then?”

“No; not exactly in danger,” said I, “but you would like to see your daughter, and the roads are fit for travelling. Doctor Henderson will come to see you to-morrow. Mrs. Drummond will take every care of you. I will post as quick as I can, and Helen will come at once when she sees your warrant.” I put my hand in my breast pocket, as I spoke; the paper was not there. How could it have dropped out?

“Never mind, lad,” said Forbes. “Helen will come on your own word. She would go with you anywhere; and so she might; man or woman never heard a falsehood from your lips, or I am mistaken, and where there is truth there is safety. It is not worth while to write, and my hand would tremble so, it would frighten the lass. Bring her to me, Lucien! I could not close my eyes in peace without seeing her. Good-bye and God bless you!” and he wrung

my hand with more strength than I thought he had—"if we never meet again, you will keep your promise to me and mine, and get the last prayer of a poor and heavy-laden sinner."

I told him my hope of seeing him again, and of his ultimate recovery. They were words of course, but I was in haste to be gone. He merely said, "No, lad, there is no recovery in this world for me," closed his eyes again, and turned his face to the wall. Downstairs I found my travelling companion, Tom, in active preparation for the journey. He knew every cross-cut and short way of the east and west country, valued neither wind nor weather, but never set forth without proper precautions, for Tom was a sober, cautious, and very honest Scotchman. He proved a worthy friend and ally to me on that same adventure, though I thought his examination and securing of our travelling apparatus somewhat tedious.

"It's a bonny night," said Mrs. Drummond, who had come close to my side at the open door to speak of the banker, whom I solemnly committed to her care; she promised everything, and I knew she would perform it—"it's a bonny night." Well might the good woman say so

as she looked out on the sea of silvery moonlight that filled the clear, cold air, and glittered on the frozen ground. "I don't wonder you like to set out, sir. It is just Providence that has sent such weather for you to go on an errand of mercy, as one may say."

"Yes, mother," said her daughter Janet, coming to look out too, for the house was slack that evening—"if the gentleman who had the other tower room had waited for this, he might have got south at once without going to Falkirk through the snow."

"The other tower room!" said I, as a recollection of the muffled sound behind Forbes' bed occurred to me. "I thought you had but one?"

"No, Sir; I told you we had two the night you came," said Mrs. Drummond, and she gave her daughter a reproving glance, which sent that well-disciplined young woman into the kitchen; "but we had only one for you and Mr. Forbes, because the other was occupied by a gentleman who came about an hour after you. He wouldn't go in the parlour, wishing to be quite private—between ourselves, as I know you to be a discreet person, being Mr. Forbes'

friend, he had reasons for not mixing with other folk, though I think it was overscrupulousness. He didn't just say it, but as far as I could understand what he hinted to myself aside on his first coming to the house—and no man ever came in more quietly, he was a Southland relation of that unhappy man, Andrew M'Ewen, and had come to help the widow and family to settle their affairs and get out of the neighbourhood—a trying dispensation, sir, for honest, upright people to have such kith and kin ; but the works of Providence are not to be comprehended.

“ He was so anxious to be private and out of sight, that nothing but a chamber to himself would satisfy him, so I gave him the other tower room as the most out of the way. It opens on the other landing. You could neither hear or see each other. There is a door of communication between the two rooms ; they were the principal ones in the old tower, you understand, but I locked it up to keep them warmer and more separate, and set the beds against it on each side, I'll warrant you never knew the gentleman was there at all ; he went away as quietly as he came in the afternoon of the next day. It was providential that Tom and the farmers went

out to get a doctor for your friend, for they helped him through the snow to Falkirk, from which place he was going south. A very resolute but sober and serious gentleman he was, sir, given to study his Bible, being much impressed, no doubt, by the unhappy case among his kindred. He paid me for my trouble, and seeing he wished to be so private I would not have mentioned him at all, but young folk are a' ready."

I looked out at the moonlight that the worthy landlady might not see the effect of her disclosures. The locked-up door and the beds set against it on each side, explained the noise which Forbes thought so unearthly, and which rather frightened me. Whoever the sober and serious gentleman that slept in that bed might be, he had a tolerable chance of hearing every word that passed between me and the banker; but a relation of Andrew MacEwen, who could not mix with Falkirk farmers for fear of recognition, a Southland man and a perfect stranger too, would not be likely to repeat the tale, yet I felt it would have been safer out of his keeping, and set forth with an unquiet mind concerning Forbes and his daughter.

CHAPTER XV.

ESTHERS' LAST PLOT.

THE old post roads north of Tweed, if more primitive than those of England, had also the advantage of being more numerous. There was not a frequented route that had not sundry highways and byways; ancient travellers can still trace them over moor and hillside, through glen and forest, in some places diminished to mere sheep-tracks, in some relapsed to the heath and moss once more; but those acquainted with them could get over ground remarkably in ante-railway times, and by one such Tom Drummond brought me safe to Glasgow, when the watchmen were proclaiming midnight in its streets.

The solitary journey and social converse we had on the moonlit moors, made good friends of Tom and I. He knew the errand on which I

was bound ; I had learned to estimate his surprising knowledge of by-roads and short cuts, and with a little persuasion he agreed to bear me company as far as the border, otherwise Carlisle, which was the limit of Tom's travelling experience. In the meantime, rest was necessary to us both, and we repaired to the " Buck's Head Hotel," which proved to be a house in correspondence with the " Barley Sheaf," one of the many it could boast, great and small. There we were to have a few hours' sleep, start with a fresh horse early in the morning and push on through Lanark to Dumfriesshire, which, Tom said, had the best and shortest byways in all Scotland, and with the help of Providence, and steady driving, we would reach Carlisle before the turn of the night.

I submitted myself entirely to his guidance ; in fact, I would have flattered or bribed Tom, had either been practicable, for the earnest, anxious impulse to get forward was growing upon me every hour, not so much for Forbes and his daughter's sake, I should be ashamed, so to say, but it was true, that they only furnished me with an apology ; but Madame Pali-vez filled my mind and troubled my sleep ever

since that night when her far-off cry woke me up to hear the banker's terrible night talk, and learn the fate of my long-lost brother; thoughts of her had come, in spite of the wonder and the fear of that ghastly revelation; and still it seemed as if my dream had been a warning, and the cry a veritable call for my help or presence.

I made Tom understand how early we ought to start in the morning—the setting moon would do as well as the daylight in that clear cold weather. He agreed to start at six; I was pleading for four as we entered the still-open hotel; it was settling down for the night, but the waiter—he from Ireland, who made the comment on Forbes' energy—met me as I entered with “Your name is Mr. Lucien La Touche, sir?”

“Yes,” said I.

“I thought it was all right,” said the waiter. “Here is a letter for you; a Greek gentleman left it yesterday; he did not leave his name, and did not stay a minute, but if you did not come here within three days I was to send it by post to the Palivez's Bank, in Old Broad-street, London, for the gentleman pleased to give it into my charge.”

I had the letter out of his fingers and opened before his speech was done, for it was addressed to me in Madame Palivez's handwriting, and was dated "Old Broad-street, November 15th."

That was the night I slept at the "Barley Sheaf," and heard the cry in my dream; but she was well, the hand was bold and clear as ever, and I read on :

"Lucien, I know not what makes me write to you to-night; I know not if my letter will reach you, but there is a messenger from our house going northward, and I could trust him to find you or anybody. It is half-past eleven, a dark, cold, stormy night, but it can't be the weather that is telling on my spirits; many a worse night I have lived through when the wind was low and the stars shining; but there is an impression on my mind that the last of them is near, if not come to me.

"It cannot be the eclipse I dread, my thoughts were never as clear and calm; but I wish you were here, I wish you had not gone. By-the-bye, Esthers is gone from me too; he was not in your place and I do not miss him so, but he has gone without cause or warning—the first

servant of the Palivezi that ever left his post ; the old house is coming down, you perceive, and rats run from it. But come back to me, my friend, as soon as you can ; it may seem weak and childish to say so, after letting you go, but I never longed so much to see any face as yours within this hour. If the shadow in which I stand is really his of the scythe and sand-glass, and we should never meet again on this side of the clay, I know we shall somewhere in the after life, for our souls are related, and all other kindred or connexion is but the casual companionship of a journey in which there is little choice and much meeting through necessity. May you be fortunate in that share of it which falls to your lot, and wise not to demand too much or build too firmly on it !

“ Take your part out of life as best you may, reckoning it poor enough not to be made poorer by critical examination or censorship. Well that it passes so quickly. I did not think so once, but I do now ; an outlet to the other side of Lethe seems opened for me, and the prospect is vague, but fair ; I think the Fates are not in possession still. Farewell, my friend, I wish you were here ; but sleep is creeping over my eyes ;

it gets more dominant over me as years go on. Farewell! I will go to rest; but come when you can to

“EUSEBIA PALIVEZ.”

She was safe and well, not yet attacked by the dreaded evil. Her talk of approaching death had grown common of late; but she wished to see me, and I wished to see her.

“Is it from the gentleman’s daughter, sir?” said honest Tom, as I put the letter in my pocket-book and resumed pleadings for four in the morning.


“No,” said I, “it is from the manager of the bank, wanting me back to business; we must get forward if possible, you see; and I went on with my causes of haste, real and manufactured, all the time wondering what the said manager had gone to do in Ireland on his own account, it being evident that Madame had not sent him. He had shown Forbes a paragraph in *Saunders’ Newsletter*, the same that made Melrose Morton start up from our fireside, and which I could not bring myself to ask the banker about.

Was it to make out matters regarding that subject, to fish up information, to put odds and

ends together, and bring the true tale home, that Esthers had gone off to Dublin, and made me believe he went on the business of the house? If so, my best efforts would be in vain to keep Helen out of his power, even if her father were called away beyond the reach of accusation and law.

The story of my brother's fate would be a weapon in his hand which her sensitive nature could not resist or fly from; it would in some sort enable him to annoy myself and sister too. The secret which had foiled such earnest search and long inquiry was likely to be made too clear now that it could serve no good purpose; but things must take their course. I would do my promised duty, and hasten back to Madame Palivez. Oh that some beneficent power might send her troublesome manager to the bottom of the Irish Sea in his out or homeward voyage, I cared not which!

Tom was won over by arguments, and we started at four next morning, with the moon and stars lighting us for many an hour, and the frost standing our friend in getting us over marshy moors and hollows filled with snowdrifts. I know now that the south-west of Scotland is not



all heath and bog, but Tom's short cuts seemed to lie entirely in such regions; they brought us to no large towns, to few villages, to some poor and lonely inns, but he knew every turn and stretch, could tell me how many Scotch miles we saved by avoiding the more frequented highways and seemed to have friends and helpers wherever horses were kept or whisky sold.

We got out of Lanark and into Dumfriesshire about Tom's dinner hour, which I thought unfortunate, for there was another "Barley Sheaf," a house of humbler pretensions, but kept by some relation of his, in the midst of a peat moss through which our road ran, and there he would stop, horse and man, for one full hour—no small clipping out of a winter day. I am sure Tom was perfectly sober when we started, but the by-ways of Dumfriesshire did not seem so well known to him, and, what was worse, the frost was relaxing its rigour in that southern country; small showers of sleet came with the afternoon, changing to rain as it wore on; our ground grew slippery and soft, our wheels got into ruts, and our horse into mires. In short, it was what Tom called heavy travelling, and our progress was proportionably retarded.

Often, but internally, I cursed the peat moss, the "Barley Sheaf," and his dinner therein, as the cause of all our troubles. But the day went down in a dim drizzle, the night came on without moon or star; it was a decided thaw, likely to be a deluge too, and we were labouring through the bogs that slope down to the Solway Frith, the deepest mud and the worst road man ever travelled, and still, by Tom's own computation, ten Scotch miles from Carlisle Gate.

"He is tired, poor beast," said the kindly Scot, as our horse struggled through the mud, that grew deeper every step. "He has had heavy work since forenoon; but if we could get to Springfield, my father's old crony, Robin Armstrong, would lend us his Galloway mare as far as Carlisle, and give us good entertainment too. You will have heard of Robin, sir, on your travels? he is a man of great respect in Springfield; keeps the inn and the forge; and being bailie of the place, does the particular business besides."

"What sort of business?" said I.

"Why, sir, I thought you southern gentlemen mostly knew what was transacted at Gretna Green; Springfield is near by it, and gets quite as many of the folks that marry in haste."

“And repent at leisure,” said I.

“No doubt they do, sir; but I wish we could get to Springfield; there are cousins of my mother’s, Elder Macpherson’s kin, that might be helpful to us if Robin were not at home, but he don’t go much abroad on account of the comers from England. I couldn’t have mistaken the road, though it looks a deal deeper and worse than the last time I travelled it from Carlisle Tryst, just three years ago come Candlemas.”

Here our horse, gave one tremendous plunge and stuck fast, gig and all, in a quagmire which crossed the road. We both scrambled out and did our best to extricate them, but all in vain; there was no firm ground for the horse’s feet; he plunged deeper every step; we could scarcely find footing ourselves on the stray bits of turf and stone. The night was pitch dark, though the rain had ceased; earth and air were wrapped in one damp mist. Our muddy, narrow path was bounded on each side by high banks of moss, spongy and slippery from the recent thaw.

“Guid help us,” said Tom, reverting to the vernacular in his extremity; “we’ll hae to stop here till daylight, and a wet berth it will be.”

Stopping there till daylight was beyond my calculations. I exhorted him to make another effort, and Tom shrunk from nothing. We tried and tugged, but horse and gig stuck fast; I lost my footing, tumbled into the quagmire, struggled up again, and gained the mossy bank, half drowned and very dirty. The footing there was pretty good, I scrambled up with the desperate hope to find some better ground for our weary night watch, but from the top my eye caught a twinkling light far down in a hollow on the other side, and at the same time that heavy sighing sound, which only the wind-shaken woods can equal, reached my ear, and I knew that we were near the sea.

“It is the Solway Frith,” said Tom, catching it too, as he scrambled up beside me, “and that light, praise to Providence, is not wild-fire—can’t you see the house down in the hollow?”

I thought I could, and started down the bank; the ground sloped suddenly, but it was dry and stony, and five minutes brought me to a low, long thatched cottage, standing alone in the midst of that valley of the moors. There was no sign of life but the glimmering light

which twinkled from its fast-shut window, no sound to be heard but the moan of the Solway.

"I know the house," said Tom, coming up with a whisper; "they call it the 'Solway Fisherman,' an ill-reputed place for the harbouring of smugglers; this glen goes down to Frith, you see, and they can bring up their run cargoes; it harbours the worst of the southern runaways too; but I know where we are, within two miles of Springfield, I know the road; let us walk on; the house is no canny."

"Canny or not," said I, "if they can give us a light, and help to get out the gig, it is all we want;" and running up to the door, I knocked at it with all my might. There was a shuffling of feet and a sound of low voices within.

"There may be smugglers inside," said Tom; but I gave another volley of knocks, the door was opened a few inches, and a tall, masculine, sour-looking woman demanded what was my will.

"Light and help to get a horse and gig out of the bog here," said I. The words were scarcely uttered when there came a cry from within—

“Help me, save me, Lucien La Touche!” and I knew the voice of Helen Forbes.

To dash the old woman aside and rush in was the work of an instant. Tom followed me, for he was staunch. Within there was a narrow passage, and at the end of it a door, from which light shone, and people seemed to be struggling within. I rushed forward, but a man bounded out, pointed a pistol at me, and was taking deliberate aim, when in the desperation of the moment I flung myself upon him; I heard the trigger click, but it did not go off; I seized his arm, and tried with all my strength to push him back and get into the room, where I dimly saw two forms who seemed struggling, the one to get away, and the other to detain.

I saw the face of my antagonist at the same moment—it was Esthers, looking exactly as he had looked at Forbes’ family exercise, but not uttering a sound, and evidently intending to shoot me, if possible. All passed in less than a minute. I heard Tom’s exclamations, and knew he was engaged with somebody in the passage. I held fast for life, and tried to force my enemy back, but his strength was greater than I could have expected; he wrenched his

arm from me, pointed the pistol once more ; but as his fingers were on the trigger, I made another clutch, turned the deadly weapon from myself without knowing what I did, it went off at the same instant, and Esthers staggered back and dropped in the corner.


There was deep silence among us for a minute, as if every one was stunned, but I heard him say distinctly, though it came hissing through his clenched teeth—

“You have killed me, but I have taken revenge on your lady in London !”

CHAPTER XVI.

THE LAST OF THE PALIVEZ.

THERE was a clamour of many voices and a rush of lights ; the next moment the old woman got in between me and Esthers, an old man came close behind her ; Tom ran to lift up the fallen, and cried, "Lord be about us, he is dead !" but I was in the room, and caught poor Helen as she broke away from the detaining woman and fell fainting in my arms, while a perfect volley of shrieks from the latter drew my eyes in that direction, and I saw it was my once prized and promised Rosanna Joyce, otherwise Mrs. Barry, who was going off in powerful hysterics, which even then I knew to be assumed. My senses were confused and bewildered ; but there was another room half open, and out of the tumult I carried poor Helen in,



and supported her in my arms till she opened her eyes, and said,

“ Oh, Lucien ! it was God that sent you ; he brought me a paper from my father, which bade me go with him, and I went taking Rosanna ; I didn't know she was his confederate. We travelled post by strange roads, and he was civil enough till we came here this afternoon on an excuse to put up from the rain ; but it is near Gretna Green, Lucien, and he wanted to make me marry him, saying he had found out something that would ruin my father, bring him to the gallows, he said, but it couldn't have been true. Rosanna helped him, and they threatened ; but is he dead, Lucien, is he dead ; have you killed him ? and I am the cause of all ? ”

“ Compose yourself,” said I. Her brief but clear account had not only enlightened, but brought me to cool judgment again. The tumult had by this time subsided ; Rosanna's shrieks had ceased, though she still sat moaning in the corner. Tom, with the help of the old man and woman—the only inhabitants of that solitary and ill-reputed inn—removed the body to a convenient bedroom, and the young

Scotchman set off through the dark night to Springfield for a doctor and Robin Armstrong.

"Robin is a bailie," he said. "I can witness, and so can all here, that the shooting happened by accident, that you had no arms about you, and only struggled to save your life ; you'll have to appear, no doubt, but Robin will take bail when he hears the story from me. I think the Macphersons would be sureties for you ; it's a terrible business, but stay here till I come back."

I assured Tom I had no intention of flying, knowing myself to be guiltless ; and sat with Helen talking and explaining, while the house settled down to the silence in which I found it. The old man and woman quietly closed the door upon the dead—they had witnessed scenes quite as strange in their day—and retired to the cooking of black puddings in their kitchen, which our arrival had interrupted.

Rosanna, getting no attention, subsided into real fright, cowered for some time in the same corner, then rapidly recovered her composure, and before Tom's return was looking and talking as innocently as she used to do when Charles

Barry was up-stairs and I was kept below on account of Sally's fits.

She didn't know there was anything particular on Mr. Esthers' mind when he took Miss Forbes to Scotland; she went to keep her company, and when he talked about Gretna Green, how did she know it was not made up between them? she hoped I wouldn't be the first to blame her, after being the cause of all her misfortunes and poor Sally's illness, she might say.

I should have been puzzled how to deal with her, but Helen, whose good sense and proper spirit were never found wanting, told her to be quiet—she had allowed herself to be made an instrument in a wicked design, and might have to appear in a court of law, on which Rosanna shrank away, and made no further demonstrations.

For my own part, I did not clearly understand how Esthers had managed the affair, till Helen showed me the identical slip of paper which her father had given me in our bed-room at the "Barley Sheaf," and which had been so unaccountably lost out of my great-coat pocket. Then the case was plain; his journey to Ireland was a

tale got up to cover his following us to Scotland. With that strange instinct for tracing and ferretting out which nature had conferred upon him, little to his own advantage, Esthers had pursued us from stage to stage, kept our coaches in view, stopped at our inns without his presence being ever suspected, so great was the man's ability for subterfuge and disguise.

Mr. Taylor, from Manchester, who talked to the chamber-maid in No. 15, at the "Buck's Head Hotel," in Glasgow; the postchaise that followed us through the storm; the relation of Andrew M'Ewen, who wanted to be private, and kept close quarters in Mrs. Drummond's tower room, with a locked-up door and a key-hole between his bed and that of the banker, whose invisible movements struck the overladen mind with superstitious terror, while he got possession of a long-hunted fact which put the entire family in his power; who took his departure in good time, despite the deep and drifted snow, and carried with him the paper which he had probably seen me consign to the pocket of my great-coat, from some concealing corner of the old house, and which he knew would be the only and the surest means of inducing Helen to

set out northward in his company—it was all clear and intelligible, yet how had the well-laid scheme been utterly foiled and frustrated by the accident of Tom's delaying dinner, our gig sticking fast in the quagmire, and my own determination to get help from the ill-reputed inn! So it was ordered, and so it came to pass. Esthers had found his own death in his sudden solution to be avenged on me; sudden it must have been, for no human foresight could have anticipated my coming to the solitary house at such an hour. By that accidental twist in our struggle, the bullet from his own pistol penetrated the right side of his chest, passed through the lungs, causing instantaneous death, as the examining surgeon stated.

With him the secret, condemning as it was and hardly won, by which he intended to command the Forbes family and possess their riches had gone down to forgetfulness and clay, for Esthers was not the man to confide such a weapon to any hand but his own, its use entirely depending on the hold he kept of it. The banker was safe, and so was his daughter; but what did those dying words of the Jew mean, "I have taken revenge on your lady in London.

He feared Madame Palivez, but he also hated her. I remembered his look when leaving her saloon, as I sat in the concealed closet. Madame was well when she wrote to me on the 15th, but oh, for wings to have flown to London at that moment! I scarcely heard poor Helen's thanks and praises for my gallant haste to her deliverance, or deep deploring that I should have been brought to so much trouble on her account; that blood should have been shed and that the unhappy man should have passed to eternity without time to repent and turn from his evil ways. The woman to whose service I was bound by such a fatal yet voluntary vow stood still between me and all others.

Tom Drummond returned in less than two hours, bringing with him all the authorities of Springfield—the doctor, the minister, and the renowned bailie, Robin Armstrong. There came, also, two of the Macpherson kin, who were leading men in the place, and some of Robin's people to extricate the horse and gig, and swell the number of witnesses. The faithful Scot had raised his clan and his acquaintance, and at his station stood me in good stead

with the Springfield men. Not one of them doubted Tom's account of the transaction, or my innocence of intentional bloodshed. They all went into the room and looked upon the dead.

I went with them, heard the country surgeon make his statement regarding the cause of death which was too evident to require much examination, and saw the look of fierce, triumphant hatred, now fixed for ever on the Jew's face. How like he looked to the ragged man when he held the bridle-rein and lunged with the knife ! how like his sister Sally, when she leaped out from behind the rose-coloured curtains—they were all the grandchildren of that old money-grubbing Reubens, to whom my father mortgaged Widow Clark's houses, and whom Forbes paid with the four thousand.

The Springfield men agreed it was a lamentable business, and then adjourned to the parlour in which Helen still sat as composed and thoughtful-looking as the minister himself. She gave a clear and distinct account of the whole affair to the bailie. It was corroborated by every soul in the house. Rosanna would swear to all that Miss Forbes said, and was entirely innocent herself.

The old man and woman—by-the-bye, their name was Christian, a common one on the Scotch border—though doubtless in Esthers' pay, had now no reason to misrepresent the facts, and the worthy magistrate decided that my part in the transaction was purely accidental; no man could be blamed for standing on his own defence, and the pistol did not go off in my hands; it was one of the remarkable dispensations of Providence.

The case being thus clear, and every one of us having urgent reasons for quitting the place—I for London, on bank business, of course—Helen to see her father in his sore sickness—Rosanna in haste back to her husband, I think she said he was dying, and Tom to return to his widowed mother and the “Barley Sheaf,”—Bailie Armstrong took our depositions in due form, with all necessary addresses and information regarding us and ours, bound us over to appear when summoned—the two Macphersons being sureties for me at Tom's request.

They may talk of Scotch caution, but it never bars the claim of friendship or kindred—then the bailie took possession of and sealed up the effects of the deceased, contained in a small

portmanteau, and inquired if the unfortunate man had any relations who might be summoned to look after his remains. I explained how Esthers had been situated with regard to relations, as far as I knew it, promising at the same time, that if his nearest connexions, Jeremy Joyce and Charles Barry, did not attend to the matter, I would see his funeral properly conducted, and bear the expense, if necessary.

In the meantime, the corpse remained at the "Solway Fisherman," to await the procurator-fiscal's precognition. The two old Christians hoped that somebody would pay them for their trouble; they knew the gentleman had brought money with him in that box, on which the bailie discreetly advised them to keep quiet, and their claim would be considered in proper time. He also told us that his house in Springfield was at our service, and there was not better ale to be got in Dumfriesshire. I went with him and his company, sending the two ladies in the extricated gig, under Tom's escort; they were glad to get anywhere out of the house of death, and Helen was anxious to speed on to her father. The little village of Springfield had gone to bed,

for it was near midnight, but Robin's house—by-the-bye, it had the sign of "The Blacksmith," and was a long, low, thatched fabric, much like the one we had left, only in better condition—was bright with fire and candlelight shining from all its windows. They had heard of the accident there, and were waiting for the bailie; his good wife took charge of Rosanna, at my request, to spare Helen her further company. Robin and his party sat down in the best parlour, to have a discreet glass, and moralise on the lamentable business. I parried their hospitable invitations to join them, got a quiet room for Miss Forbes and myself, where I explained to her my anxiety to get back to London, and the safety with which she might proceed northward under the conduct of honest, trusty Tom.

"I know you are anxious to see Madame Palivez," she said, with a slight quiver of the lips; "was it her the unfortunate man spoke of in his last moments, do you think?"

"I don't know; I am afraid it was, though I cannot understand what he meant. That and many considerations make me wish to get south as quickly as possible, and I know you will be safe with Tom. I would not send any one

with you, Miss Forbes, in whom I could not place the most perfect confidence."

"I am sure of that," said Helen; "get forward, and I will try to do the same."

I should have felt rebuked by her sad and chagrined look at any other time, but my mind was full of old Broad-street and its lady. I took Tom Drummond aside from his moralising friends, made him sensible of the duty he had to do for me, for Miss Forbes, and her father, and promised everlasting friendship and gratitude for the same.

"I'll take her to the 'Barley Sheaf' safe enough, sir," said the honest fellow. "I think the weather is going to be fine, and we'll take the high road. The young lady won't be in such a hurry as you were, and I have asked Robin Armstrong to lend you his Galloway mare—she'll go like the wind—and a kind of a light trap he has, and take you to Carlisle in time for the night mail. It starts at half-past one now, and you won't get to London a quicker way, as there is nobody to take you through the by-roads of England. I'll stop here for the night; so will the young lady, I'll warrant. It is a very decent house," said Tom, in a

whisper; "we'll start early in the morning, and get to Glasgow before nightfall, with the help of Providence; and an hour's run to Carlisle is nothing to Robin's Galloway mare. I suppose that other woman will be going back to England by the Gretna coach.

"She is a lass one would not care to travel too far with by all accounts, but Robin's wife will look after her. Do come in, sir, and get some refreshment before you go; they are just putting the mare in the trap."

I spent little time with Tom and his companion. Before the clock struck twelve I was rattling away with the Galloway mare and an experienced driver on the Carlisle road. The night was calm and the moon was rising. The road, though muddy, was not like those we had traversed on the preceding day, and I reached the frontier town of England in time to get the only vacant place in the night mail to London. It was the quickest mode of travelling I could find; but the miles seemed so long and the stoppages so many. Looking back on that time of suspense and anxiety makes one appreciate the express train and the telegraph of these days.

To London ! to London ! my heart flew far before the swiftest wheels and the best blood horses which then carried northern mails. It would have outstripped any locomotion ; but the journey was done at last. We reached St. Martin's-le-Grand in the forenoon of a dim foggy day ; the sky all mist and the streets all mud, and through them I sped to Old Broad-street. There was a chaise going off, and a number of respectable-looking city men scattering away from the private door.

What could they have been doing there ? Another look, and I saw a hatchment over it. " Is Madame at home ? " I inquired of the porter, pushing in as he was about to close.

" Madame is at home for evermore," said the Eastern man, giving me a grave, stern look from head to foot ; " she is going to rest with her ancestors in the vault beneath St. Nicholas' Church, in Kief. May her soul find peace ! "

" Dead ! " said I, and the sight left my eyes for the moment.

" Yes, dead," said the porter. " Why was the Signor absent when her trusted manager had left his post without leave, and the illustrious high-born Eusebia Palivez—the last and

noblest of her princely line—was found in her own chamber, foully murdered by the mute maid she had taken from the Signor's house?"

Before he had well spoken it, all flashed on my brain : the meaning of the Jew's last words ; the meaning of his nightly conference with Hannah which I had the chance to see, but did not understand, or the deed might have been prevented. It may be that my desperate, horrified look frightened the porter, for he stepped back and I passed him, walking straight up to the saloon where I had seen her last rebuking Esthers, to which she had gone up from me to receive Prince Dashkoff. Nobody prevented, nobody noticed me, till I got into the room ; it was hung with black drapery, which covered walls and windows.

In the centre stood a kind of platform, also covered with black and set round with wax candles ; on it there lay a coffin covered with purple—the Palivez colour in life and death. It had a gold plate with a Greek inscription, which I could not read ; but I knew what that coffin hid from me for ever, and scarce knowing what I did, I stepped into the circle of Greek priests and servants all in mourning dresses to a

brave, elderly man, with a lawyer's face, but a Greek also, who was sealing a piece of purple silk over its lock, while a priest in full canonicals held the key.

"I was her friend in life. She trusted and talked with me. For mercy's sake let me see her face for the last time?" and I pressed nearer.

"It cannot be, young man," said the Greek lawyer, calmly finishing his work—it was not the family crest, but a cross and crown he sealed it with—"it cannot be; the face once so fair is covered to the resurrection-day. Pray that you may see it then among the just."

The priest placed the key in his hands, and the entire circle sank on their knees while he chanted a short prayer, to which the assistant priest responded in long-drawn dreary tones till it sounded like a requiem. Then they sprinkled the coffin with holy water, made the sign of the Greek cross seven times upon it, and all prayed in silence for the soul of the dead.

In a few minutes the kneeling circle rose; the family crest and escutcheon were brought in by

old Marco, and the man who had sealed the coffin—he was Cuzenes, the juris-consult, who lived and did business in London long after—broke them over its lid, at the same time proclaiming in Greek, Russian, and English, that the last of the Palivezi was gone to God and to the souls of all her line in the Paradise of the Patriarchs; that none of her name or lineage now remained on earth, and her house, sprung from the princes of Egina, and without blot or stain for fifteen hundred years, had passed from among the living.

“May their souls find peace, and the will of the Highest be done!” he added.

And the prayer was repeated by all the circle, who immediately began to scatter away, the whole ceremonial being concluded except the funeral feast, which, according to Greek custom, was spread in the rooms below.

I would have given the world to break that seal and see her face once more. It was a foolish thought, perhaps, but I made one last appeal to Madame Oniga, who was there as the chief of the household.

“It cannot be, signor,” she said, “and it

should not. These English had to see her according to their law—the inquest, as they call it—may shame fall on them! but no man should see the last lady of the Palivezi with a gashed throat and a bloody shroud. We think it strange that the signor should have been absent. Was he not her friend?”

The Russian woman spoke out the thought of the entire household, for every one of them cast grave, reproving looks on me, and I believe regarded me with suspicion ever after, for that unaccountable absence I did not care to justify myself then, and I have taken no trouble about it since, but as I turned away a sudden thought crossed me.

“When did it happen?” I enquired.

“On the night of the fifteenth; we know not at what hour, nor how the dumb girl got access to her chamber, which Madame always locked in the inside. It was found open in the morning, and our noble mistress was dead—slain in her sleep, it seemed—and when the house was searched for the murderer, blood was found on the dumb girl’s clothes, and a knife, which one of the maids had seen by chance in her hands, stained in the same fashion and

hidden under her bed. Will not the signor come to the funeral feast? it was the will of God to take our mistress so, and none of us may sorrow too much without sin," said Madame Oniga, as I turned away once more, feeling that my life had fallen to ruins, and the light of all its summers lay sealed up in that coffin.

Maybe it was well that it had been sealed, and that Greek pride or prejudice denied me that last look on the face of the dead; thereby no memory of blood or of grave-clothes blends with my recollection of her. It is still as I saw her last up among the hanging flowers and arching boughs, waving her white hand to me in careless freedom and flinging back the braids of her bright hair. Her last letter was written to me with the shadow of death falling on her fearless spirit. She had wished me by her side, trusted, and believed in me, and given me those last counsels while she stood on the borders of the grave.

On the night of the fifteenth—on the night of the fearful storm, which had rocked the old house on the Falkirk-moor, and made the oaks about it groan from their ancient hearts—they

knew not at what hour, but could it have been the very same at which I saw her in my dream, prepared for a far journey, on which Hannah Clark and Esthers were to bear her company, to my vexation, and heard her call to me from the far back rooms so loudly and wildly that it woke me up to hear the 'tempest raging without and the conscience-stricken banker within talking in his sleep of my brother's murder! It may be superstition, but I believe it was her death-hour and her voice that gave me the sign and brought me out of sleep, to hear the revelation she had guessed at so long, and I had once suspected her of knowing too well.

Life has mysteries which run deep into the invisible state, though never to be proved to commonplace and untried people, and that dream became a link between her and me which the grave could not break, nor the years wear away. My mind has recovered from the shock of that day's discovery, but the blow was heavy for the time.

It seems absurd to me now, unreasonable, and something to be ashamed of, but it is true, so strangely does great and sudden grief

affect us, that I bitterly regretted the evil chance which cancelled my vow, prevented my doing her that last service, and the sacrifice of myself to her shade. I have lived to be thankful for the fact, though not for the manner of it, but then my reason and my conscience were both stupified.

I turned away from Madame Oniga and the funeral feast. I could not look again on the coffin and the wax candles around it, which should burn there night and day till it was moved into the Russian ship and borne away to Petersburg, and thence over plain and river to the family vault in Kief. As I went downstairs, there was somebody waiting for me. I did not notice her at first, but it was my sister Rhoda—wise and noble girl.

She said not one single word, but took me by the arm, and walked with me some way through the streets. Then I saw Melrose Morton was at my other side, and we were going to the old Greek Coffee-house in Finsbury Pavement. It was silent and deserted-looking, exactly as I had seen it that first Christmas-day of mine in London, when Watt Wilson told my family's tale to Esthers. The time was but four years

ago, and what a cycle of life I had passed through since then !

In the coffee-house we all sat down, and they told me everything they knew of the inquest, and of Hannah's evident guilt. The whole, though corroborated by many additional circumstances, amounted only to what I had already heard from Madame Oniga.

My sister had sent for Melrose as soon as the news reached her, and gone to look after the criminal creature with whom she had held such early companionship. Rhoda was a brave girl, and a sensible one ; but I think Hannah's deed gave to all her after life a tinge of superstitious terror regarding the deaf and dumb.

" I went before all the gentlemen and talked to her ; maybe it was bold, but nobody else could speak to the creature at all ; and, Lucien, she holds out she didn't do it, but that Madame killed herself, which I know, in my own conscience, is not true ; not to speak of the signs against her, and her telling me that Esthers was to be heir of all Madame's bank and riches, and that he would marry her and make her a lady. That's the way the villain bribed her up to it, you see ; women can be got to do anything for

wicked men that takes the right way with them," said Rhoda; "but when she knows that he is dead and gone—goodness! but the works of Providence is wonderful!—she'll own it, maybe; and I don't think they'll bring her to the gallows but just make it out madness—which it is, and worse. Poor misfortunate soul, who could ever thought that she would do the like?"

CHAPTER XVII.

CONCLUSION.

RHODA'S predictions were realized. When the news of Esthers' death was imparted to Hannah, she acknowledged her guilt, with no sign of repentance for the fact, and, strange to say, no sorrow for him. It was ambition and not love that had made her his ready instrument. Hannah believed in his heirship, and in the promise of marriage, which was no doubt equally false ; for, in selecting her to do his wicked work, the Jew had manifestly calculated on an accomplice who could not betray him, and would be neither understood nor credited if she made the attempt. My sister's conjecture was right, too, as regarded the law proceedings. Our knowledge of the case, and all the influence we could command

being employed on Hannah's behalf, the plea of insanity was accepted by judge and jury, and she was kept in custody as a criminal lunatic.

I had no difficulty in proving my own innocence of Esthers' death, in proper form and according to Scotch law. When all was over, and all inquiries satisfactorily closed, I saw him laid down in Springfield churchyard, and the Joyces somehow contrived to prove themselves his heirs.

Before that business was done, the Scotch papers announced the death of Mr. Forbes, which took place at the "Barley Sheaf," one week after Helen's arrival, and the Falkirk doctors could not certify whether his disease was a slow fever or a rapid decline. Doctor Alexander Henderson, with whom his conferences had been long and private, doubtless knew it to have been a burdened conscience; but the sound sense and Christian prudence of the aged minister made him waive the subject of public confession and satisfaction on account of the living. He prayed by the dying bedside of his early communicant, said he believed him to be a sinner saved, as all sinners must be,

through free and sovereign grace ; and in great sorrow, tempered with pious resignation and eternal hope, his loving daughter closed Forbes' eyes, without ever suspecting the sin that had made them so sad and weary.

I had promised Forbes that none living should hear his crime from me, and I kept my promise according to common sense and without casuistry. Melrose Morton knew the whole story ; he had hastened northward in time to see his dying cousin, had talked with him alone, had heard of his confession to me, and in the privacy of our own home showed me a paragraph in *Saunders' News Letter* of the 31st of October. It briefly stated that some workmen, while clearing away the ruins of a house in Kildare-street, said to have been the town residence of the Earls of Galway, to make room for new stables behind the "Royal Hotel," had found a skeleton and a horse-pistol beside it, buried under the floor of one of the back rooms.

It went on to say that an inquest had been held the same afternoon, but no inquiry could cast any light on the strange discovery, except that it was the general opinion that murder must have been committed in that house, but

when or by whom, it was impossible to conjecture ; the coroner summed up, the jury returned a verdict accordingly, and the mouldering relics of humanity were laid in St. Michael's churchyard. We both knew what that paragraph meant, and whose bones they were that the workmen had found under the floor. It was requisite for many reasons, and chiefly to remove the suspicions against Morton, which had crept into her mind, that Rhoda should know it too. On my sister's discretion and sound sense we could place implicit reliance ; she was therefore made acquainted with the facts. They astonished far less than relieved her honest heart. She made her usual reflections, "that the works of Providence was wonderful, and who could have thought it ; but it was a great mercy to know, anyhow."

Then Melrose and I took a quiet voyage to Dublin, found out the sexton of St. Michael's church, and induced him, for a suitable consideration, to assist us in privately, and under the shadow of night, removing the remains of my ill-fated and long-sought brother to a grave beside that of the father to whom his loss had been so terrible.

We did not leave Dublin till both names were engraven on the head-stone which Forbes had set up, and the grass had grown long about; and none but the well-paid sexton, and the equally rewarded stonecutter, knew that the thing had been done. When we returned to No. 9, it was agreed between us three that the entire tale should never be mentioned or referred to, if possible, in our after years; and the compact was faithfully kept by all.

So the banker's sin was buried with the dead, the sorrow of the Palivez line with the last of them; and time, which covers graves with grass and ruins with ivy, passed on and brought its changes to us as to all the living.

The Comenzoni, when they came into possession, made over to Helen Forbes and myself the money, plate, and jewels bequeathed to us by Madame Palivez. The golden reliquary was not among the latter. I made no inquiry on the subject, and therefore never knew into what hands it had fallen, or for what purpose the Greek house retained it; but all her servants, except old Marco and his wife, who went with her coffin to Kief, remained in their employment.

I did not refuse my share of the bequest, but Helen did, saying there must be some mistake; what could induce the Greek lady to leave money and jewels to her? I was equally unwilling to accept the half of her father's property which he had willed to me.

The very unusual dispute, as the lawyers called it, produced frequent meetings between us. Helen was desolate, and so was I. My sister would not marry Melrose Morton and leave me alone. It was a pity to keep them out of their own house and home. There was one woman that loved me; what if she were Forbes' daughter? Her hand and heart were unstained by the sin that lay so heavy on his.

All that Madame Palivez had spoken in her favour—ay, when she vexed my pride and folly by making me over to Helen—came up to memory. It was like obeying Madame's last wishes. Well it is that every woman does not know the motives which make men woo and wed; yet many have been worse than mine.

Suffice to say, I proposed to, and I married Helen Forbes on these various accounts. She accepted me willingly, yet with womanly dignity,

and every year of our married life taught me to value more, and profit by, her sterling qualities of head and heart. The natural result was a strong and sincere affection, founded on esteem, and therefore more apt to stand the wear of time and trial than the first romantic and unreasoning love. Under its influence, our early differences in faith and practice, which once seemed such insurmountable causes of division, gradually melted away. Helen's mind got emancipated from its Puritan prejudices without losing the sterling principles which gave it stability and strength. I, after such storm and shipwreck of my world within, learned from her fair example to cast anchor in the same safe haven.

The tranquil years of man have no history. We lived calmly and happily, confiding in each other, and easy in our circumstances. Not in Notting Hill House: the long sad years of her father's unexplained troubles made it dreary to Helen, and the memory of Forbes and my lost brother would have given me no rest in it. We left the mementoes of these things, and many more, behind us in London and its neighbourhood, went northward, and bought a pretty

country house in the pleasant borderland upon the banks of the Tweed, and not far from the old burgh of Melrose, where the Mortons made their settlement. There we lived in peace and contentment, had two sons, who grew up to be our consolation, and are now doing men's part in the world. But I am alone, for Helen was taken from me two years ago; and life has but one expectation now, namely, to follow her.

Melrose and my sister are old people like myself, with their four children married and settled in different Scotch towns; but we are often together, and sometimes talk over that long and weary past. It is more than forty years since all the romance and adventure of my life came to a close beside the purple-covered coffin that held the last of the Palivezi. I have grown a better and a wiser man since then, though the lessons that made me so have been slowly and quietly learned.

But now, in the evening of my days going peacefully down the hill-side which leads to the valley of the shadow, with hopes that look to the breaking of a brighter dawn beyond; and memory, the watcher, gazing far backward on

those luckless years not to be lost or softened in the distance of time, I write rather for the instruction than the entertainment of my readers this story of "A HIDDEN SIN."

THE END.

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